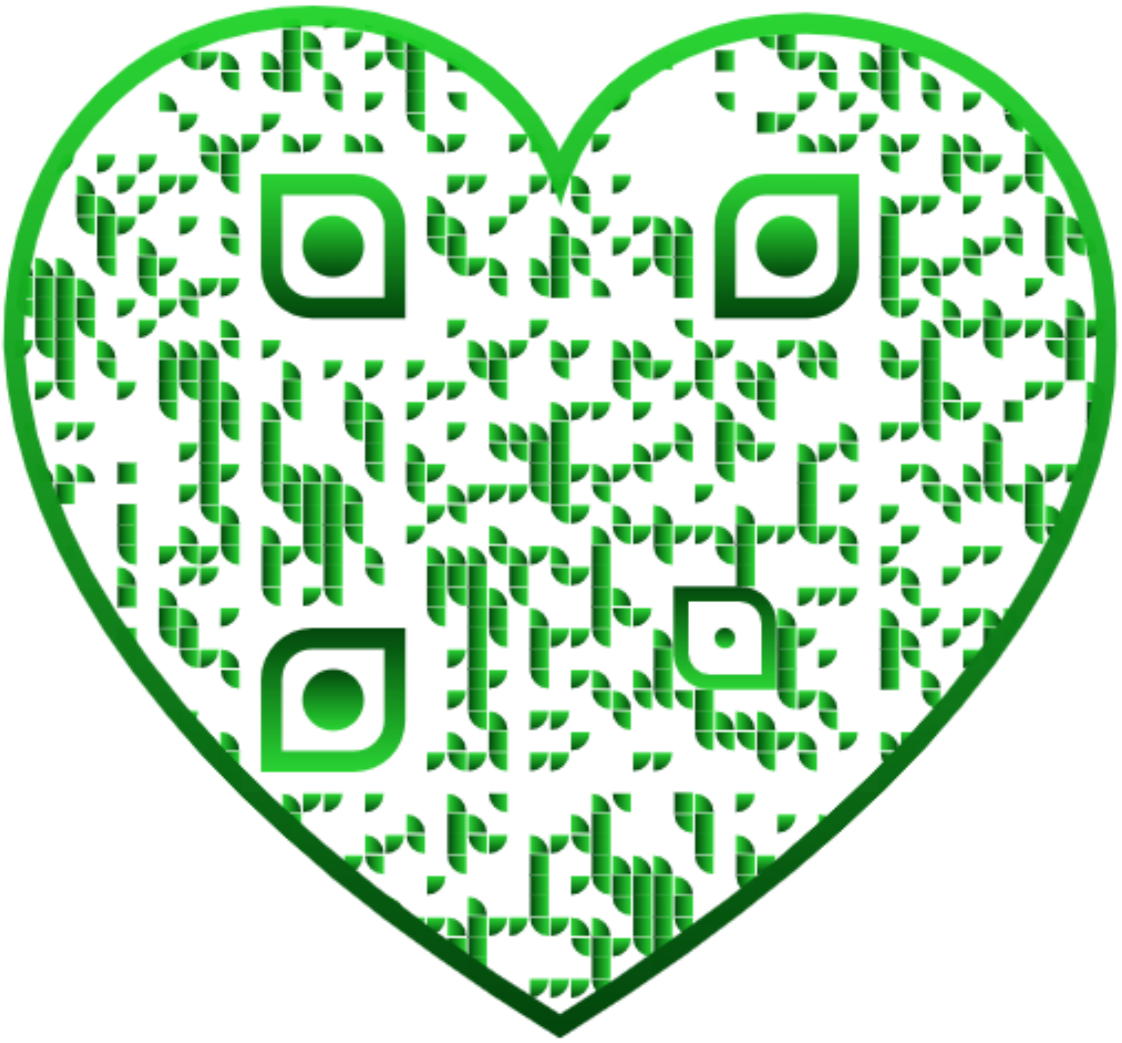
# Naturalistic Occultism

## An Introduction to Scientific Illuminism

*2nd Edition*

IAO131



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# Preface to the Second Edition

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

The star of magick has just begun to rise. No one can foresee what uncharted territory we may find if we follow it. The spiritual pursuit has always held a special place in the hearts of men and women, though its forms are diverse and ever-changing. Naturalistic Occultism is a new approach to that voyage to which we are all called: the journey to Know Thyself. When I released the first edition of this book on the 105th Thelemic New Year (March, 2009 e.v.), I couldn't have known the desire of many occultists, both young and old, to have a scientific approach to the practice of magick. It seems that the modern occultist more often than not innately resonates with the idea of pursuing the aims of religion with the methods of science. The response has been overwhelmingly positive and encouraging, and if there has been one consistent complaint, it has been that the first edition was too short.

The book began as a couple of essays that attempted to understand the astral plane and astral projection in terms of modern neurology. These were combined into chapter 15 of this book, and other chapters were slowly added. These ideas came out of a desire to be able to integrate much of what I was studying at the time – specifically, social psychology and cognitive neuroscience – into my understanding and practice of occultism. As I have learned more, my understanding has increased yet I have found that what was written for the original edition needs to be largely untouched. For the second edition of this book chapters have been edited, many more references have been added, and new chapters have been written. Notably, the new chapters include an exploration of what it means to be a Scientific Illuminist, a consideration of the use of phenomenological language in writing the Magical Record and communicating with other occultists, and a psychological explanation of synchronicity. I've also included a “Glossary” in the back of the book that defines many occult terms in naturalistic language, summarizing much of what the bulk of this book is dedicated to explaining in depth.

I want to emphasize that this book is intended to be an initiation in the most basic sense of the word. That is, the ideas expounded here should represent a new beginning: the field of Naturalistic Occultism is only in the nascent phase of its development. The nurturing of this approach to its maturity will require the insight, collaboration, and hard work of magicians such as yourself. I encourage anyone who reads this book and is inspired in the least by its approach to contact me and to learn more about the aims of the Society of Scientific Illuminism. I am more than willing to discuss the ideas found in this book in greater detail, to hear suggestions for clarification and expansion of these concepts, and to learn of any criticisms that you might have.

Though the star of magick is only on the horizon, it may soon be a guide for humanity, aiding us in navigating the waters of the mysteries of existence. The process of clearing away the clouds of ignorance, superstition, and dogma has just begun, and I encourage you – anyone who has been called by whatever means to know and master the forces of Nature found in yourself and the world – to join me in this exciting undertaking. Together we may strive towards the perfection of ourselves, the progress of our field, and the creation of a thriving community of Scientific Illuminists.

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Love is the law, love under will.

# Chapter 1 – A Naturalistic, Scientific Approach to Magick

Naturalistic Occultism is the attempt to understand occultism without positing anything supernatural or even found outside of the mainstream social and natural sciences such as psychology and neurology. It is the attempt to cut superstitious beliefs and acts away from the practice of occultism, ceremonial magick in particular, with a critical and pragmatic eye. Can the astral plane and astral projection be understood in terms of contemporary science? How can the effects of ritual be explained physiologically? Is there a psychological reason why people think divination and horoscopes work? These are the kinds of questions that a Naturalistic Occultist asks.

This book presumes at least some familiarity with the various aspects of ceremonial magick. There is a great deal of fantasy, swindling, superstition, and charlatanism in the field of occultism. Hopefully this book will encourage the scientific pursuit of the study of ceremonial ritual and occultism in general. In separating the gold from the dross, we will question several assumptions about the world of occultism and, as a result, many of these assumptions will have to be altered or discarded. Naturalistic Occultism does not attempt to explain mystery (the world and especially the results of magick) with more mystery like new age and occult books often do, i.e. explain feelings, insights, and concepts in terms of mysterious energies, chakras, planes, spheres, rays, planets, trigrams, etc.). Instead, the attempt is to try to ground occultism in modern science while ridding ourselves of as many unnecessary and superstitious assumptions as possible.

In a sentence, Naturalistic Occultism is a paradigm that approaches the occult with scientific knowledge, skeptical rigor, and a pragmatic attitude. It a continuation and evolution of Aleister Crowley's motto for the A∴A∴, “The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion.” In this sense, Naturalistic Occultism is essentially a form of – or just another name for – Scientific Illuminism. It holds that you need not look farther than psychology and

neurology for naturalistic explanations of the various aspects of the occult. The rest of this book is dedicated to exploring this basic idea.

A naturalistic approach to magick means that magick's theories, conduct, and results will be understood and explained in terms of the natural world. No supernatural entities or forces will be entertained as they are not needed. This will be accomplished in this book by explaining occultism's many facets primarily with psychology (the study of the human mind and behavior) and neurology (the study of the human nervous system, especially the brain).2 It is unfortunate that occultism is plagued incessantly by superstition. This could largely have to do with the connection and overlap that occultism has with the New Age community which is notorious for pushing pseudo-science in all forms. We will frown upon making vague or ambiguous claims like invoking “astral currents” or “subtle energies” unless these are explained further in psychological or physiological terms.

A scientific approach to magick means the theories, conduct, and results of magick will be understood and explained with a scientific attitude. This attitude includes skepticism (not cynicism), focus on empirical (i.e. directly observed) evidence, and the desire to fit “occult” happenings into a scientific worldview. Skepticism means facing explanations with doubt and suspending judgment about any claims made by others until one is provided evidence. The accumulated facts and theories of the natural sciences – especially psychology and neurology – are ever-growing and more than enough to explain virtually all “occult” phenomena.

To begin this scientific approach, we must see that there is something absolutely fundamental that neurology accepts but that many people do not realize or understand: Our perception of the world and ourselves – our entire consciousness – is essentially a product of the workings of that marvel of nature known as the human nervous system.3 Specifically, the human body has adapted to receive external, sensory stimuli and interpret that information, creating a representation in awareness. For example, vibrations of electromagnetic energy hit the eye, rods and cones are activated in the eyeball and turn the stimulus into electrical signals, which is sent through the optical nerve, a rally point in the brain, and then to many

complex parts of the visual cortex. Only then do we become aware of some "sight."

The entire "outer" world is understood as the human nervous system retrieving, interpreting, and producing a conscious awareness of sensory stimuli. The entire "inner" world of thoughts, emotions, memories, desires, decision-making, etc. is understood to be a product of the workings of the human brain conjunction with the other systems of the body (such as endocrine and circulatory systems). Therefore the entire world of which we are aware – mind, body, and environment – is a product of the intricate and complex workings of the human nervous system interpreting the world. Changes in the nervous system will be accompanied by changes in perception. This was called "The Astonishing Hypothesis" by Francis Crick – the co-discoverer of the double helix structure of DNA – who wrote, "the Astonishing Hypothesis is that 'You,' your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules."4 This is one basic fact which we may begin to integrate and keep in mind as we pursue a more scientific understanding of occult phenomena.

Magick might therefore be defined as "the volitional control of the human nervous system through manipulation of itself, the rest of the body, and its immediate environment." The study and application of magical correspondences (e.g. The Magus = Mercury = Beth = 2) can be understood as the intentional conditioning of associations between various sensory stimuli (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile feelings) with abstract or moral ideas (e.g. intelligence, fluidity, courage, cunning). Initiation might be understood as the de-conditioning (i.e. overcoming mental and behavioral habits) and then reconditioning of the human nervous system in accordance with the volition of the organism. All of these ideas and more will be treated more fully in later chapters.

The view espoused in this book, called Naturalistic Occultism and Scientific Illuminism interchangeably, is naturalistic (no reliance or reference to the supernatural), scientific (systematic, clear, and using the latest facts of psychology and neurology), and pragmatic (things accepted

as provisionally "true" because they are effective and useful). The reasons for this are many, but foremost is the vision of a scientific understanding of magick that was first enshrined by Crowley in the phrase "Scientific Illuminism" (also called "sceptical theurgy" by Crowley, and we might add "de-mystified mysticism") and its motto "The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion." This vision sees magick not as a superstitious, haphazard collection of beliefs and rituals but rather as a systematic set of methods to attain specific ends, especially altered states of consciousness in particular.

Although they are being applied to occultism, the facts and theories presented in this book are based on recent scientific experiments and writing. Because the nature of the scientific pursuit is essentially to propose the most correct hypothesis possible at any point and test that hypothesis through empirical experiments that may prove the hypothesis to be false, all of the conclusions drawn in this book are suggestive and provisional. The ideas are therefore never absolutely conclusive. For example, the neurological explanation given of the astral body, astral plane, and astral projection (chapter 15) is a suggestion based on recent research into out-of-body experiences. There could easily be a new study that overturns the older studies, gives a new perspective to them, or adds to their clarity. The essential attitude we adopt is therefore both scientific rigor and skeptical open-mindedness. The hypotheses given to explain occult phenomena conform to the standards of science while allowing the possibility they may be overturned in the future. This is a built-in safeguard against dogma in science, which the field of occultism not only may use but desperately needs.

Occultism – as I am sure anyone who is even remotely familiar with the field is aware – is full of charlatans, impostors, and plain fakes who swindle people out of their money, time, and dignity. The amount of pseudo-science peddled under the labels of "New Age spirituality" and "occultism" is really astounding, but it is mostly just unfortunate. What these charlatans end up doing is discrediting the entire field of occultism as an avenue of serious study.5 All the public knows of occultism and magick are things like superficial horoscopes seen in magazines, grandiose tarot card readings received on the street, and ridiculous claims of pop-psychics like Sylvia Brown. One need only browse the "Occult/Metaphysical" section of any

bookstore to see that serious tomes on occultism by serious occultists are juxtaposed with books dedicated to various superstitions and pseudo-sciences.

There are basically two types who might be averse to the view of magick as espoused in Naturalistic Occultism: (1) the charlatan who fears and hates science and (2) the pseudo-scientist who disingenuously makes use of the rigorous and systematic sound of scientific language to make his or her fraud appear "scientific" and therefore legitimate. The first type includes those who always give the argument against a scientific understanding of anything occult that it is a "materialization," "psychologization," or simply "making it mundane." This type finds some strange satisfaction in explaining the mysteries of the world with more mystery – strange, ambiguous words – perhaps out of a misunder-standing that science says everything they believe in is a total illusion. They retreat into the obscure and supernatural to explain their beliefs, many thinking this gives a sort of "magical" feel to their lives.

It is, in fact, a depreciation of the natural and the human to think that explaining occult phenomena in terms of the psyche is somehow a "reduction." We can probably all agree that occultism should be a tool to enhance and expand awareness so as to more effectively appreciate, embrace, and integrate into reality, rather than using it as a tool to escape from reality. In contrast to this first type's fear, Naturalistic Occultism tries to show that Nature Itself – including human consciousness – is mysterious and magical. All the extraordinary visions, feelings, and states of mind of humanity are latent in the psyche. Instead of this being a "psychologization" of magick, it is an infusing of the psyche with magick. A scientific understanding of occult phenomena as belonging to the human psycho-physiology does not diminish their beauty, interest, noetic (knowledge-giving) quality, or mystery. In fact, we acknowledge the human psyche as beautiful, interesting, full of potential wisdom to be uncovered, and ultimately mysterious. As it has been said, "It's all in your head – you just have no idea how big your head is."6 The claim that science is "reducing" or "limiting" all these things is essentially based on a misunderstanding of science itself. Science is only limiting in the same sense that sanity limits what we take as reality.

The second type that might be averse to the ideas of Naturalistic Occultism are the peddlers of pseudo-science: those who use the language of science to present their superstitious claims as legitimate. The prevalence of using pseudo-science to support charlatanism in the occult is widespread, to say the least. How many people have heard of various machines supposedly showing you your aura? How many people have heard the explanations of why homeopathy supposedly works? How many people have heard of correlations between chakras and nerve ganglia in the body that somehow proves their reality? In a sense, this type is worse than the first because they manipulate the validity of the scientific pursuit to give their own pursuits a false shroud of validity.7

To give just one example among seemingly infinite, there is a group called the "Spiritual Science Research Foundation." From their name, you would think they conducted scientific research, but you would be wrong. If you look at their actual material, you'll see various diagrams, graphs, and tables of data about different things, e.g. the effectiveness of various positions of prayer.8 The tables will have numbers like 5% or 30% to show the supposed effectiveness of different physical positions for praying. What are these numbers based on? They are entirely based on intuitive guesses of their author and absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to empirical, scientific research. Calling one's own intuitive introspection "science" does not make it science, and arranging numbers into a table does not make the data empirically verified or scientifically valid in any way. Unfortunately, there are always those who will see the name of this organization and its charts and graphs of data and end up thinking that they are scientifically investigating spirituality. On the contrary, they are simply reaffirming and solidifying their own superstitions through pseudo-scientific justifications. It is either a fundamental misunderstanding of what constitutes "scientific research" or a deliberate attempt to manipulate people into thinking one's theories are scientifically verified and therefore legitimate.

In short, pseudo-science is nothing but fraud cloaking itself in the language and symbols of science. Naturalistic Occultists have "set [our] faces against all charlatanism, whether of miracle-mongering or obscurantism; and all those persons who have sought reputation or wealth by such means may expect ruthless exposure, whether of their vanity or their dishonesty; for by

no gentler means can they be taught." For every pseudo-scientist's miracle, we substitute a repeatable method; for every charlatan's obscurantism, we substitute a clear, scientific understanding. We agree with Fortune that, "All available occult phenomena should be carefully investigated, not only for the sake of obtaining knowledge, but also for the sake of unmasking charlatans."

In a very real and intentional way, Naturalistic Occultism is part of a long tradition of attempting to unify Science and Religion. That is, Naturalistic Occultism represents part of the effort to embrace the power of the scientific method and its current collection of data and theories while acknowledging the validity, power, and subjective reality of religious experiences.

The main obstacle to occultism being systematized, clarified, and simplified is the common aversion to science in occultists today. As mentioned before, this mainly comes from the false presumption that science "reduces" or "limits" the phenomena of which occultism speaks. Instead of seeing the deadening and "psychologization" of magick in approaching occultism naturalistically and scientifically, we instead see an exciting synthesis-in-progress which opens up many new opportunities and avenues for applications and exploration of our practices. A new set of standards opens up a new set of possibilities: scientific, naturalistic occultism is not the "last word" or the "last step"; if anything it is a first step.

Naturalistic Occultism points towards a new type of occultist who does not fear science but instead acknowledges and wields its power; who sees nature and the psyche not as dead, uncovered (in the sense of fully known and therefore uninteresting), and non-mysterious but rather as alive, containing uncharted territory ready to be explored, and endlessly mysterious; who informs their scientific knowledge through their experiences and understands and improves their experiences through their scientific knowledge; who acknowledges the subjective reality of occult and mystical phenomena without overstepping their bounds and imputing objective reality to any connections seen, visions seen, sounds heard, and meanings interpreted; who embraces both the experiential beauty of occultism's possibilities and the cognitive beauty of science's systematic

approach of rigor and clarity in explaining phenomena. More will be said about this new type of practitioner in later chapters of the book, but for now we may end with this quotation:

*"1. We are Mystics, ever eagerly seeking a solution of unpleasant facts.*

*2. We are Men of Science, ever eagerly acquiring pertinent facts.*

*3. We are Sceptics, ever eagerly examining those facts.*

*4. We are Philosophers, ever eagerly classifying and co-ordinating those well-criticised facts.*

*5. We are Epicureans, ever eagerly enjoying the unification of those facts.*

*6. We are Philanthropists, ever eagerly transmit-ting our knowledge of those facts to others.*

*7. Further, we are Syncretists, taking truth from all systems, ancient and modern; and Eclectics, ruthlessly discarding the inessential factors in any one system, however perfect."*

We are Scientific Illuminists. We are Naturalistic Occultists.

# Chapter 2 – The Scientific Illuminist

What differentiates the Scientific Illuminist, or Naturalistic Occultist, from others in the field of occultism? There is a diverse amount of groups under the general title of "occultism." It will help elucidate our particular approach by comparing and contrasting Scientific Illuminism with these other forms.

I would like to make a disclaimer before going into this subject that (a) it is arguable whether certain groups would consider themselves to be under the umbrella of occultism and (b) the characterization of these groups will inherently be over-generalizations and over-simplifications. I have no desire to get into the history of occultism, the lineages or successions that led to the formation of groups, or the various sub-groups of each group: this is merely to illustrate how Scientific Illuminism is similar to and different from these different traditions. These "groups of occultism" are therefore used for convenience and illustrative purposes.

Every one of these groups have fallen prey to different limitations and distractions and by examining them we can avoid their mistakes. For convenience, we can classify the sub-groups of occultism into New Age, Hermeticism, and Chaos Magick (a useful but neither exhaustive nor particularly accurate categorization).

**New Age**

In this group are those forms of spirituality you would often find in the "New Age" section of your bookstore, including but not limited to the earth-based spiritualities that are often classed under the title of "paganism." People that are part of the New Age movement tend to lack a sense of scientific scrutiny, and, even beyond this, exhibit an explicitly anti-scientific stance, saying that scientists aren't open-minded, that science can't explain the nature of things they believe in, or that scientists are actively "out to get" (to disprove) anything New Age. This leads to two major problems: the rejection of (what is perceived as) "mainstream science," thereby denying themselves a great deal of knowledge and wisdom, and,

secondly, (as mentioned in the previous chapter) an uncritical acceptance of things masquerading as science that justify pre-held beliefs (the popularity of the movie “What the Bleep do we Know?” immediately comes to mind).

Beyond this antipathy to science we may also find – despite the general anti-materialistic stance many New Agers outwardly maintain – a decidedly capitalistic or consumer-oriented culture. Anyone who has been exposed to this group should be familiar with the pervasive buying-and-selling of crystals, stones, divination tools, alternative healing remedies, statues, books, incenses, etc. etc. ad infinitum. One need only take a step inside most “occult” shops to be bombarded with such things (though the shops do in fact provide a service as, at the very least, a way for people to learn more about these subjects). I have nothing against capitalism itself or the consuming of goods (including trying to make a living therefrom), but I do feel that what is largely a personal, internal, and spiritual journey has been co-opted by the spirit of our times, which is so systemic and pervasive that both buyer and seller co-create this culture of consumerism. People would certainly not sell these things if there wasn't a market of people who are buying them. It should come as no surprise that, because of the manipulation and charlatanism inherent in our system where the primary goal is profit, we find many people swindled out of money, time, and energy.

**Hermeticism**

The Hermeticists are a group in which I include many branches of occultism that utilize a system derived from sources such as Agrippa, Dee, and Golden Dawn as well as being connected to some form of ceremonial magick and/or Qabalah. This group often falls prey to a false sense of superiority, a lack of philosophical scrutiny, and a heavy reliance (even “faith”!) on Tradition or authority (i.e. some important person said it so it is true).

The sense of superiority is most likely a vestige of this sub-group's aristocratic heritage. These things were studied and practiced by those with time and money to do so (Aleister Crowley included). The sense of superiority often comes in the form of contrasting High Magick with Low Magick or theurgy with thaumaturgy (similar to how, in Buddhism,

Mahayana or “the greater vehicle” was contrasted with Hinayana or “the lesser vehicle”). It's certainly not an inherent problem to feel oneself superior, especially that internal sense of having an innate nobility. The problem comes when this superiority is derived from having read or collected more books, memorized more correspondences, acquired more ritual implements, created a fancier temple space, or having been initiated into some society or lineage rather than being derived from one's actual work on oneself (“Success is your proof,” as it is written in The Book of the Law, or, as Jesus purportedly said, “By their fruits shall ye know them.”).

The Hermeticists also tend to lack philosophical scrutiny. That is, there is often an uncritical acceptance of certain “truths.” For example, the structure of the Tree of Life, the fact that the mind is “higher” than the body, and the very correspondences between things (e.g. Yellow = Air = The Fool = 0 = Aleph). A large portion of this book is actually dedicated to challenging many of these very assumptions.

Finally, in this group we find a form of faith in tradition or authority. This goes hand-in-hand with the lack of philosophical scrutiny. Things are accepted simply because John Dee, Crowley, or the Golden Dawn cipher manuscripts say so. Dion Fortune made a virtually identical point when she wrote, “Occult science needs to rely more on an appeal to facts and less on appeals to first principles which may very well be fanciful. It has not yet freed itself from the trammels of the Middle Ages, and still uses pre-Baconian methods, depending on argument and authorities rather than on observation and experimentation.”

It's certainly not illogical to put greater weight on an expert's opinion, but we should remember that they are just that: opinions. The greatest scientists were not great because they were “right” or they had found Truth. Rather, they are great because they were stepping stones to a greater understanding. The beauty of this is that knowledge is a never-ending process: there are always more data that could be found, theories to be adjusted, superseded, or overturned, and further mysteries to be approached.

**Chaos Magick**

Chaos magicians tend to have a largely material emphasis in terms of goals and also tend to lack a systematic approach. Though in theory Chaos Magick does not inherently have to do with material as opposed to spiritual goals, we often find that, in practice, it is often used to achieve material ends. The use of the sigil is a prime example, where it is often used to get money, get someone to become romantically interested, destroy an enemy, and similar goals. There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with using magick for material purposes, but when it is done to the exclusion of the mastering and perfection of ourselves as well as might be called some form of "attainment," we are all the more likely fall prey to the various desires that will lead us astray from our Paths as well as forming attachments and preoccupations that may interfere with the objective and critical attitude that is necessary for a scientific approach to occultism.

The lack of a systematic approach is built into the nature of Chaos Magick. In holding that all belief-systems can be used interchangeably, there lacks a solid, agreed-upon system of philosophy. It is here that Chaos Magick, in one sense, coheres with the approach of Scientific Illuminism in its emphasis on pragmatism but also, in another sense, differs from our approach in that there are no unifying philosophical foundations such as naturalism and empiricism. In its stance of radical pragmatism, it lacks a language and belief-structure that will help coherently explain and produce repeatable instances of "occult" phenomena. Consider how, with the Hermeticists, we may all invoke the same force, using the same correspondences, and test whether we get the same results (that is, we can examine inter-rater reliability in the language of statistics), yet, with the Chaos magicians, we lack this unifying theoretical foundation, isolating the practitioner.

**Summary**

Before summarizing, I want to mention that there is one demon that haunts all these groups: the demon of glamor. All of these sub-groups are common in that the practitioners are often haunted by this demon. The kind of pride that comes with saying "I am a high priest," "I am a 3rd degree," "I work with Enochian angels," "I am in a direct succession from Gerald Gardner," "I know the secret techniques of the Order," and the like are virtually never

useful. Crowley wrote, “If there is one emotion which is never useful, it is pride; for this reason, that it is bound up entirely with the Ego... No, there is no use for pride!” I tend to agree with this statement though one should note that I said “virtually never useful”: it is quite possible that it may be of some use in some situation, and I wouldn't want to entirely exclude it on the basis of some a priori assumption.

That being said, it is obvious that while we all need to form some sense of identity, the glamor of occultism often sweeps us up into a sense of pride that is not useful at all. It makes us have unrealistic appraisals of ourselves and our powers, it causes us to unfairly denigrate the contributions of other groups, and it often makes us miss the spirit in favor of the letter (that is, we focus more on the title than what it represents). Those who would consider themselves Scientific Illuminists should be wary of these dangers.

Now we can adequately assess where these different sub-groups of occultism have gone astray so that we may learn from their mistakes, adopt their strengths, and adapt to be more efficient, thorough, and confident in our methods. Again, we acknowledge that this categorization is neither exhaustive nor entirely accurate, but it will help us clarify our own way.

**The Pitfalls of Certain Sub-Groups of Occultism**

*New Age*

· Lack of scientific scrutiny; antipathy to science and scientists

· Consumerism

*Hermeticism*

· Sense of superiority

· Lack of philosophical scrutiny

· Faith in tradition and authority

*Chaos Magick*

· Goals are largely material in nature

· Lack of a systematic approach

Though each of these sub-groups have pitfalls, they all have certain admirable qualities. New Age occultists and Chaos magicians tend to be skeptical of authority and tradition as well as encouraging of trying out alternative approaches. Hermeticists tend to have a desire to be systematic and complete in their theories. Chaos magicians, as already mentioned, tend to value what works over what is True (i.e. pragmatism) and they often maintain an attitude of irreverence in that they often maintain a sense of humor, which, it should be noted, is possibly one of the most potent weapons against glamor and pride. The most universal characteristic of being seduced by this demon of glamor is the inability to laugh at yourself.

Though their pitfalls have been listed, it is of absolutely no use to look down upon these different sub-groups of occultists. I believe we should view anyone that is part of these traditions (or similar ones) as brethren, fellow travelers and fellow students of the Mysteries. We should be realistic in that we are both aware of their shortcomings and appreciative of their contributions. Scientific Illuminists should work in the spirit of collaboration and progress, not one-upmanship and competition.

In light of all of this, we can examine where Scientific Illuminism stands. We hold no antipathy towards “modern” or “mainstream” science. Rather, we actively integrate and synthesize insights from the scientific community that are relevant. We are not averse to science, we are averse to dogmatism, which can come both from scientists and occultists. The inability to admit you are wrong is what we are against. As it has been said, “The sin which is unpardonable is knowingly and wilfully to reject truth, to fear knowledge lest that knowledge pander not to thy prejudices.” Though we hold science in high esteem, we nonetheless must be wary of being overly reductionistic or simplistic. We must acknowledge the limits of the empirical method of science – the foremost being that we can never speak in terms of absolute Truth since there are always new data that may contradict our hypotheses and theories – while being open to its contributions.

Correspondingly, we have no blind faith in tradition or authority but we also must give weight to what experts in their fields have said. For example, we may acknowledge that Crowley was high skilled in conversing with astral entities and therefore look to him as, at the very least, a foundation to be built upon, but we must also take what he says with a grain of salt, acknowledging that he could be wrong and that there have been advances in science and philosophy to which he could not even possibly privy (as one illustrative example, he is one of the most modern of the occultists yet died before the discovery of DNA). It would be folly to accept what he or any other authority (or "Tradition") says without scrutiny and it would likewise be folly to totally ignore their contributions.

As Scientific Illuminists, we are wary of commodifying our purposes and methods. Capitalism is so embedded in all of our brains by virtue of the fact of our having been brought up in modern society that the desire to turn a profit from what we are doing is a continual threat. We must always reorient ourselves in the direction of progress, both internally (what is often ambiguously called "spiritual progress") and externally (the progress of our theories & methods of occultism as well as the growth of our community). Even if we do turn our attention to the effecting of material ends, it must be done in the spirit of exploration and the pursuit of understanding rather than the material ends in and of themselves. In this way we guard against the shifting of our energy towards "getting" something as well as getting wrapped up in clinging to various attachment, instead maintaining our focus on learning and growing.

Scientific Illuminism has no place for a sense of smug superiority. Though we may think our theories and practices are "better" than others, we should constantly be respectful of other traditions and practitioners. As The Book of the Law says so succinctly, "There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt," and we have no right to insist that anyone is fundamentally wrong in pursuing their Wills, even if it does lead to ignorance, obscurity, ambiguity, or ineffectiveness. We must acknowledge that their goals are not necessarily our own (and vice versa), and, though it be our Wills to engage in Scientific Illuminism, it very well could not be suited to others. In this way we guard against shutting our ears to the contributions of people outside of our tradition, and we don't waste energy on judging others.

We encourage a skeptical attitude towards all theories, including our own. The philosophical basis of things (including science itself) often goes unexamined, unscathed by criticism, and therefore we often operate under assumptions that could very well be false. As mentioned before, much of this book involves criticizing these assumptions, but it also attempts to create new theories, substantiated by current views of science and philosophy. In this way we are not averse to having a system – indeed, we have one in accepting naturalism, empiricism, and pragmatism as our foundations – yet we also are perpetually vigilant, never assuming something is absolutely true, and always searching for more accurate and more efficient ways to understand phenomena.

We can summarize the ideal characteristics of a Scientific Illuminist as follows.

Being non-judgmental of other traditions and practitioners, and therefore the focus is upon our own work.

No antipathy towards science or scientists. Encouragement of adopting scientific viewpoints when possible and appropriate.

Awareness of science's limitations and its provisional understanding of truth.

No blind faith in tradition or authority, whether from occultism or science.

Recognition of the contributions of traditions and authorities in their fields while taking their ideas with a grain of salt.

Wariness of the commodification of our theories and practices as well as overemphasis on the pursuit of material ends.

No sense of superiority of having privileged information or status. We are all fellow students.

Scrutiny of philosophical bases of our theories and practices.

It is hoped that this illustration helps you to understand the similarities and differences of Scientific Illuminism to the different strands of occultism that are popular today. The main point is to elucidate our approach and clarify our attitude in regards to matters of occultism.

The field of Scientific Illuminism is most definitely still in its infancy. Very little has been written on this approach beyond Crowley who we regard as our forefather, being the creator of the phrase “Scientific Illuminism.” There is still an immense amount of work and thought to be done, and it is hoped that this book represents, at the very least, a step in the direction of a more thorough and scientific understanding of occultism.

# Chapter 3 – Further Considerations of the practitioner

Naturalistic Occultism calls for a new view of the theory, practice, and practitioner involved in occultism. The new theory seek to explain various "occult" phenomena based on naturalism, empiricism, and pragmatism. The new practice is based on new understandings of occult practices that are informed by this theory – that is, practices that do not involve superstition or dogma. The new practitioner is the Scientific Illluminist who engages in this new type of practice and, most importantly, does so with an understanding of the self as a scientist.

The theories of Naturalistic Occultism will be discussed throughout the rest of this book. The practices that may come about from this are largely yet to be seen, but three examples are given in chapters 20-22. The nature of the practitioner in Naturalistic Occultism – which is called the Scientific Illuminist after Crowley's use of the term or, interchangeably, the Naturalistic Occultist – requires further exploration.

**What does it mean to be a scientist?**

I said above that the new practitioner views herself as a scientist. This term may bring up plenty of associations with people ranging from "cold" to "objective" to "close-minded." What I mean by a scientist is one who obtains observable data to test hypotheses. In this sense, we are all born as scientists: we are born curious about the world and we inquire, test, and explore aspects of this world to get a better understanding. We may have the hypothesis that "crying will get my mom to buy this toy" so we start to cry. When that doesn't work we disconfirm this hypothesis and try a new one such as "asking nicely will get my mom to buy this toy," so we ask nicely, mom gets the toy, and our observable data (asking nicely led to mom's purchase of the toy) support our hypothesis. Though we all use this process somewhat automatically, the scientific method makes us aware of and systematizes this process.

We can therefore reorient ourselves to understanding our practices in terms of this method of science of using observable data to test hypotheses. For example, we may use the observable data of the performance of the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram to test the hypothesis "performing the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram will lead to feeling a sense of cleanliness and holiness." We can then alter the variables to see their effects, e.g. we may perform the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram using different visualizations, breathing techniques, or at different paces in order to determine the effects of these altered variables on the observed results. We also can discern the accuracy of our hypotheses through repeatable experiments – that is, performing the ritual multiple times in the same way both by oneself by different people. Finally, we may record our results in our Magical Records, and submit these results to others so that they may be compared, criticized, and discussed just like what is done in the peer-reviewed journals of the sciences.

**The science of subjectivity**

You might object to this, saying something like, "But occultism often deals with highly subjective and internal processes that are not objectively observable (observable by people other than yourself or scientific instruments)." To this I would reply, "You are quite right, but subjective data is still observable, though it is observable only by yourself." The study of subjective experience is, contrary to popular belief, not outside the realm of science and it is therefore not outside the realm of Naturalistic Occultism.

Phenomenology is a term that is used to describe the process whereby we study things from a first-person or subjective perspective, i.e. things that appear in the consciousness of the individual. Much of what occultists are interested in has to do with the phenomenological results of practices. For example, the feeling of "cleanliness" after performing a Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram is a subjective phenomenon – a phenomenological fact – which, although it may not be observable by an outside party (except through inference such as lowered heart rate or decreased muscular tension), is still a datum that is observable by the person in question. Similarly, a person who is in Samadhi may have objectively observable

traits (perhaps a certain area of the brain that is particularly active or inhibited) but the subjective aspect of this experience – what it is like to have this experience – is only captured through a first-person, subjective, phenomenological approach. To deny this subjective aspect of the experience and to only assert the objective aspects (i.e. changes in neurochemical functioning) as real15 would be to lose not only a large part of what is important but, arguably, what is the most important aspect of the experience in the first place.

Subjective experience is naturally harder to define, harder to grasp, and harder to communicate. Instead of this making us throw up our hands in futility, this should make us approach these phenomena with increased vigilance and rigorousness. This notion of phenomenology and its importance to our practice as Naturalistic Occultists is further developed in chapter 5.

This brings up several questions that every Scientific Illuminist should consider. I do not presume to have the answers to these questions but largely would like to bring them to attention to, at the very least, start a conversation. Progress involves weighing different perspectives, taking into account multiple sources of data, and synthesizing them into new ways of viewing and interacting with the world.

**The observer embedded in the observed**

One question we might ask is: What does it mean that the Scientific Illuminist is embedded within the phenomenon being studied rather outside of it (objectively observing it)? It is no secret that the scientist has an impact on the results being observed in all fields (not only quantum physics), from the way that the phenomenon is theoretically understood to the measures chosen to test the phenomenon to the interpretations drawn from the data. In magick, the subject of inquiry is not something outside of the self to be observed from afar. Rather, the subject of inquiry is the subject herself. Since we literally cannot get a second opinion on our first-hand experience, this means – at the very least – that each person needs to know their own biases, be able to accurately experience and define their experiences, and be aware that everyone has blind spots. All of these are tied up together. This is no easy task and is obviously easier said than done.

To be aware of your own biases means firstly to know what biases are possible. There are innumerable cognitive biases that distort our own thinking from confirmation bias (discussed more in depth in chapters 9-12) to attentional bias (paying more attention to emotionally dominant or powerful stimuli than others). It also means being aware of your own defense mechanisms. Perhaps you uncover something or have a thought that is particularly upsetting: will you distort this thought to become acceptable? Will you deny that it ever happened? It should be clear that these things get in the way of an accurate assessment of your subjective experience (and also, perhaps, an argument for the necessity of occult practitioners to receive psychotherapy concurrent with their practice, as suggested by Israel Regardie).

It might be a strange thought to some that we don't accurately experience our own experiences. Consider how we might be thinking malicious thoughts about someone but not notice our underlying emotion of agitation. Consider the difference between a layperson having a thought and a person trained in mindfulness18 having the same thought. Consider the difference between saying “God spoke to me and said 'Hello'” and “There appeared something or someone and I heard a voice that sounded like it was saying 'Hello.'” There are many ways in which we are not accurate experiencers of our own experience, largely due to the fact that we are not trained to be aware of the many facets of our experience. Connected to this is the idea of accurately defining and communicating what we have experienced. Again, God saying “Hello” to you is a much more potentially inaccurate claim than experiencing an audible “Hello.” We often ascribe meaning to experiences that do not necessarily require such a meaning. To make this more complicated, it would be most accurate to say “There was an experience of an audible 'Hello' and a sense that it was coming from God or some divinity (or I felt the desire to ascribe this voice to 'God').” We cannot leave out any aspect of the experience but we also cannot make unnecessary claims either.

To know our own blind spots is, in some senses, an impossible task for the basic reason that if we knew about them, they wouldn't be blind spots. Perhaps you are not particularly trained in mindfulness and are unaware of certain trains of thought that passed through awareness. Perhaps you were careless to note any exterior conditions that might influence your

experience (e.g. the sound of water running influencing the nature of a vision). There are many possibilities, and the fact that we have biases, defense mechanisms, and a largely inaccurate approach to our own experiences lead to further challenges.

**Exploring the same or different worlds**

Another question we might ask is: Are we exploring the same world? That is, are two or more people exploring the same phenomenon? If three people are looking at a tree, we can agree they are all looking at the same objective phenomenon, yet we can also agree that all three will have different subjective experiences of the tree. This includes their different visual perspectives, their knowledge about trees, their association with trees, their current mood, and plenty of other factors. This question gets even murkier when we are talking about the observation of our own internal worlds. Suppose two people explore the same Enochian Aethyr: Are they exploring the same territory but with different perspectives like in the example of the tree? Or are there two separate "areas" they are exploring that simply bear resemblance to each other in some way?

Let us consider the nature of the psyche. Its structure can be asserted to be similar across humanity, which is arguably because we share a virtually identical physiology. We could, like Freud, assert everyone has an id, ego, and a superego. We could also, like Jung, assert that everyone has the same archetypes in their unconscious. That being said, each persons' experience of the superego and each persons' experience of an archetype will be different. Therefore we need to be cautious of flippantly using induction – that is, we need to be vigilant to guard against the tendency to say "it is true for me so it is true for all people." We cannot control for every variable when studying subjective experience if only for the simple fact that we all have a different history, a different upbringing, and a different position in the space-time continuum. The question then becomes to what extent are any of my subjective experiences useful to advance the understanding of occultism (and also of the nature of the self and the world)? I have no easy answer to this question but it requires asking if only to discuss various options we have of addressing it.

I want to raise these questions not to get answers necessarily but rather to show how deep this rabbit hole may very well go and to point out that there are many questions that remain unasked (the most insidious type of question!). We would do well to reexamine our most fundamental assumptions, questioning anything that can be questioned. This is a new era of occultism and the possibilities for its growth as a movement are unfathomable. It is my hope that this book will, at the very least, begin to inspire these and other questions to arise in the minds of this new era's Scientific Illuminists and encourage collaboration in considering potential answers.

**The method of science**

There are many new advances in the sciences that have great relevance to occultism. Fields such as neurology and cognitive science have much to say about things such as out-of-body or spiritual experiences. Though generally considered less reputable, the field of parapsychology has also done much work to try to flesh out various ideas such as extra-sensory perception (ESP) and reincarnation. It would do us well as Scientific Illuminists to be aware of these developments and, more importantly, to incorporate their findings into our understandings. This book is largely an effort to do just this.

Further, we can see in these fields that progress involves building upon the work of others. To advance at all, we need to discuss, debate, and ponder the findings of other people rather than constantly reinventing the wheel.

**Summary**

As Scientific Illuminists, it is therefore our duty to:

View ourselves as scientists, testing hypotheses through observable data.

Engage in questions about the nature of our inquiry such as the implications of our being embedded within the phenomena which we study and whether we are all actually studying the same phenomenon or not.

Be up-to-date on current scientific information on relevant phenomena.

Share our theories and our findings with each other as a community, and seek to build off of other peoples' work rather than reinventing the wheel.

These are some of the basic ways in which we, as individuals and as a community of Scientific Illuminists, may begin to extricate ourselves from the superstition and dogma of our predecessors and to be armored with a new perspective in order to see and travel into the future to uncover the possibilities which the field of occultism holds.

# Chapter 4 – What is Magick?: Subjectivity and Objectivity

When people hear about magicians they normally think of old bearded men in robes decorated with planets and stars, waving wands, and making strange incantations. In reality, their stereotype wouldn't be too far off from what is true of ceremonial magicians today (although men and women of all ages partake in such activities). Magick was defined by Aleister Crowley as "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will." In this way, every willful act of life is considered magick, which extends into the ceremonial. To Crowley, considering every intentional act of life as magick meant in part that one was living one's life spiritually or "magically," where all actions become rituals and sacraments. Even the writing of a letter requires intentional manipulation of the "external world" through the magical "tools" of letter-writing by the limbs of the "magician," which are being coordinated by her will.

Crowley's definition of all willed actions as "magick" is useful in the sense of appreciating all acts in the world as sacred or "magical," but practically it is too broad and abstract. Besides, when most people use the term "magick" they are specifically referring to ceremonial ritual which is only a particular instance of Crowley's more broad definition of magick.

Dion Fortune altered Crowley's definition of "magick" to, "the Science and Art of causing changes in consciousness to occur in conformity with Will." While it is certainly not impossible for magick to cause objective changes (most obviously in the form of inducing or changing behavior), Fortune's definition is a good understanding of magick to keep in one's mind for a naturalistic approach to occultism. In focusing on ceremonial ritual, Naturalistic Occultism adopts Fortune's definition of magick because of its focus on the changes in consciousness as opposed to changes in the objective world. We can begin to see how there is no need for mysterious occult energies and entities; all that is needed is the human psyche.

Magick offers the prospect of “a widening of the horizon of the mind” and “an improvement of the control of the mind.” There is no need to view its worth in terms of mystical, occult powers. Magick is a tool for the exploration, classification, and manipulation of the human psyche. Its techniques traditionally include various acts such as invocations, evocations, banishing, talismans, eucharists, and other ceremonial rituals. Yoga, prayer, and other religious practices are regarded as intentional, ritualistic acts of the manipulation of the consicousness of the practitioner and therefore acts of “magick.” Many consider the use of certain chemical substances and other drugs to be the intentional manipulation of consciousness and therefore acts of “magick” as well. Essentially, any act that is intended toward the end of exploring, classifying, and/or manipulation of the prac-titioner's psyche is “magick.”

Dion Fortune's definition of magick is more specific than Crowley's definition as it focuses only on changes in consciousness instead of all acts of “causing Change to occur in conformity with Will.” This definition therefore focuses more on the subjective aspect of magick. Occultists make many claims about the objective world, which means they can and should be subject to scientific scrutiny.

To be clear, any change in sensation like pain, wonder, or excitement are all subjective: no one else has access to them except through sympathy and imagination, which can never be the same as the actual experience. Any change in the physical world is an objective occurrence because the physical world has been manipulated in some way, e.g. a demon appearing to someone's eyes, the astral viewing of a room next door, or the healing of a disease through ritual. All these objective claims should be tested: if they are creating objective changes, they should be able to be objectively measured. The demon should be able to appear on film, a person should be able to observably move an object with telekinesis in a controlled setting, a person should be able to report a symbol or object in an adjacent room if they claim they can astrally project there, and the person healed by ritual should be medically evaluated to rule out other possibilities.

Most people would probably agree that ceremonial rituals can get you worked up to the point that they can change your subjective states of

awareness. What most people question is where occultists make claims about objective reality.

One problem for these claims about changing objective reality is that the boundary between subjective and objective is a bit blurry. If we accept that states of awareness arise because of activity in the nervous system (in conjunction with the other systems of the organism and the environment, of course), then we must admit that changes in our states of awareness must arise out of changes to the nervous system. This means that our willful actions are actually causing changes in our nervous system, and the nervous system then produces changes in our states of awareness accordingly. Further, subjective changes can often initiate objective behaviors: this is a somewhat fancy way of saying that your feelings can often make you act. Heat makes you take off layers of clothing, an itch makes you scratch, feeling hungry makes you eat, etc. If we are to accept that magick has any objective effects, we can safely say that acts of magick can alter the persona internally (meaning their nervous system) and therefore also can alter the person's behavior. Both the changes in physiology and behavior are objective effects which can be accepted by most as resulting from acts of magick, but we should remain skeptical regarding any claims about demons appearing, miraculous healings, information obtained through non-sensory methods, etc.

It should be understood that just because something is subjective does NOT mean it is not “real.” A vision can still instill fear, a dream can cause sweating; even though we acknowledge that dreams and visions are “not real” in that they certainly don't fit into the normal, consensual “story” of the physical world, their effects are, to use a word, objective. They change the body and often behavior. A hallucination or dream of pain feels just as painful as a pain caused by hurting the physical body.

In the end, the subjective aspects of an experience – including how it feels and what meaning you attach to it – must be understood to be subjective. “Keep separate the planes”22 – in this case, the planes of subjectivity and objec-tivity. Something can be subjectively meaningful without it necessarily applying to anyone beyond oneself – that is, your realizations and experiences may be highly meaningful for you but unimportant or

confusing to others. Again, this doesn't alter the “reality” or importance of these experiences... the subjective reality or importance.

# Chapter 5 – The Unifying Language of Phenomenology

It is useful to take a phenomenological approach to occultism and consciousness in general. What we mean by this is an understanding of the world in terms of what is experienced subjectively by the individual. This will become more clear as it is explained.

The first concept to introduce is the phenomenal field. Carl Rogers, the humanistic psychologist, gave a very clear and concise definition when he wrote as the first proposition of his theory, "All individuals (organisms) exist in a continually changing world of experience (phenomenal field) of which they are the center." Consider everything of which you are aware. This includes all of your senses – everything that you see, touch, taste, hear, and smell – as well as all of your thoughts and all of your emotions. It includes your sense of balance, the feeling of your body existing in space (and in relation to itself, such as the felt distance from your hand to your nose), and all internal sensations (such as the heartbeat). Everything that you experience is part of this phenomenal field and we are not aware of anything outside of this field by definition.

It may be useful to give an illustration through our understanding of modern cognitive science. Everything that you experience as part of the world, all of your sensory experience, involves some interaction between your body and the world. Consider the example of the sight of a tree. We do not see the tree as it is but we experience a representation of the tree. Light bounces off of the tree, hits our eyeball, is focused by the lens, projected onto the retina, is converted into neuronal signals, and sent to our brains where we then perceive an image of the tree. Now expand this to everything that you see. Even those things which appear at the very distant edge of your vision are not actually "out there": we can only see them by virtue of the fact that light has bounced off of these objects and eventually entered into our nervous system. Therefore, even the most distant objects in our awareness are actually part of this same phenomenal field, since they are representations by the body of the raw sensory data. Now expand this to

every sensory modality. All auditory (sound), tactile (touch), olfactory (smell), and gustatory (taste) sensations are equally subject to this same idea. As the physicist Erwin Schrödinger said, “The world is given to me only once, not one existing and one perceived.” Any sort of objective world outside of our experience is a matter of extrapolation and inference – all we have is our own experience, our phenomenal field.

In this phenomenological approach, there is no “external world,” there is only the phenomenal sense of interior vs. exterior. As explained previously, to become aware of the “environment,” various sensory stimuli have to impinge on sensory organs which then carry the information to the brain through various translations and interpretations and finally a conscious picture of “the environment” emerges. Therefore, the external world or the environment is simply a facet of consciousness, of the phenomenal field. It is by definition “those parts of awareness that are perceived to be outside of one's own body.” I must emphasize again: the environment of which one is phenomenologically aware is perceived as spatially external to the body but it is still a content of the phenomenal field. I am aware that these may be new and difficult concepts, but I encourage you to bear with me through the rest of this chapter as these ideas will hopefully be further clarified.

Let us consider a dream: the “external world” certainly feels exterior in dreams and we interact with it as if it is external. In reality, this entire “external world” is self-generated along with the very sense of “exterior-ness” that the environment takes on. This also leads to the theoretical possibility of overcoming this sense of interiority vs. exteriority, which is characteristically described in mystical literature. The full quotation from Erwin Schrödinger mentioned before is, “The world is given to me only once, not one existing and one perceived. Subject and object are only one. The barrier between them cannot be said to have broken down as a result of recent experience in the physical sciences, for this barrier does not exist.” That is, the phenomenal field is unified, and the distinction between subject and object is not inherent or absolute, but merely an aspect or common organizing principle of normal consciousness.

We must have a unified language in Scientific Illuminism to speak clearly to each other, just as every physicist agrees upon what is meant by

"electron," every biologist agrees a certain structure is called the "endoplasmic reticulum," etc. Since the subject of our experiments is the consciousness or phenomenal field of the individual, we must develop a language of consciousness. This language must not do injustice to science nor “religion” (that is, religious experience). It must be rigorous enough to be understandable and precise yet flexible enough to account for diverse phenomena.

In this model, I emphasize again, the subject of our experiments is the consciousness of the individual. Our results are therefore phenomenological experiences. We must therefore adopt a distinctly phenomenological emphasis and approach to the language we use in order to communicate these experiences. What this means is that the language will reflect consciousness as it appears and not describe the underlying biological phenomena. This does not mean we think there is a mind or consciousness separate from a body. On the contrary, all modern science points to the fact that an intact body (especially spine and brain) is needed for there to be any awareness. The difference is the emphasis on the subjective rather than objective, e.g. “there was a feeling of pain” and not “C-fibers fired,” though we may acknowledge the C-fibers as the physiological source of the sensation of the pain.

In short, although we acknowledge that the phenomenological nature of consciousness may emerge out of the biological, the language used to communicate various results (which will be, by definition, phenomenological experiences) will be itself phenomenological. We will describe our experiences themselves as we experience them, not in terms of various theories. Essentially, the subject of experimentation is the phenomenal field, the results or data are phenomenological experiences, and the language we use to communicate about these must be a reporting of these phenomena as they are experienced.

The brain organizes the world. One way the world is organized was already mentioned: perception is divided into inner and outer. This accounts for the fact that a feeling not often experienced is often attributed to some “other” spirit, entity, or force infusing the person in question. What is important in describing and communicating this experience is to note the character of

this feeling and the sense of it being “outside of one's self” without ascribing to the belief that it actually is outside of the self. The same is true with the sense of “owning” one’s thoughts, i.e. of identifying oneself as an ego or personality. This doesn't involve theorizing whether a self really exists or not but we can accurately and informatively say whether a sense of self exists or not at any given time. This means that phenomenological experience isn’t necessarily a dichotomy between ego and non-ego, i.e. experience can be “un-differentiated” or “unified.”

Now we have the basic phenomenological picture and the basic language. Every experience can be described using the terms above in various combinations. Let us look at some examples to see how this may be applied in Scientific Illuminism:

**Example A. Suppose person X is meditating on the image of a yellow square. Phenomenologically, X has the sight of a yellow square and perhaps various pressures in the body where the legs meet the ground or chair and muscular tensions from holding the same position. Suddenly X feels energy like a lightning bolt creeping up his spine. Many people would describe this sloppily as “Kundalini rising,” “the chakras opening,” or “L.V.X. dawning,” all of which imply various theories and metaphysical systems, but we must remain clear and concise: Phenomenologically, X is experiencing a physical sensation in the spine. The sensation is powerful and slightly pleasurable. In short, we engage in no metaphysical speculation but rather report the findings as they are: phenomenal experiences.**

**Example B. Person Y performs an invocation of Isis and then closes her eyes to begin a chant. Suddenly a figure resembling Isis appears before her and tells her to "Love all beings with your heart and soul." Y feels a great sense of peace and comfort. What exactly happened here? Was Y visited by Isis and bestowed divine blessings? Did Zeus or a demon or some spirit manifest themselves as Isis and give Y comfort for some reason? Perhaps the Devil disguised himself as Isis and gave the feeling of security to lure Y away from Jesus? All of these metaphysical speculations are fruitless and baseless. Phenomenologically, Y experienced the sight and sound of a figure resembling Isis. These were**

**overlaid with the emotional content of comfort and peace. As to the content of her message, this is where the individual must be trained mentally: most people will jump to the truth or validity of the experience because of this emotional overlay but we must acknowledge it for what it is (the phenomenal experience of certain emotions) without letting the emotions influence our belief in the truth or falsity of anything. The truth or falsity of the experience is something not affected by the emotional reaction to it, although the sense of truth or falsity is all-too-often swayed by emotional content.**

**Example C. Person Z is performing Buddhist insight meditation when, suddenly, he feels no sense of separateness from the world and he is immersed in the reality he calls Emptiness. He believes the entire Universe is his true Body. Now this is an unfortunately vague account of the actual phenomenological experience of Z. Phenomenologically, we need to focus on what we know: what exactly was experienced? Naturalistically, the sense of the environment and the body being merged together is associated with decreased activity in the spatial orientation centers of the parietal cortex. In our phenomenological language, Z's sense of his body's boundaries dissolved and he defaulted to the interpretation that the entire phenomenal field was his body. There is no mention of peace or bliss but if there were, we could say "the experience was imbued with the emotional content of 'bliss.'" One conclusion of this line of thinking is that the sense of non-separation between self and other is not necessarily correlated with bliss and ecstasy (as many mystics speak about). In fact, there are many accounts of the sense of body dissolving in patients with various neurological disorders, and the experience can be terrifying (i.e. not blissful) to certain people even without any kind of pathology. This is just one example of how a phenomenological approach can allow us to question pre-held or traditional beliefs.**

Why do we adopt this phenomenological method of understanding and communicating our results? In using phenomenological language, we (1) guard against materialistic reductionism by preserving the importance of subjective, first-hand experience, (2) condition or train ourselves to understand our experience without implicit (or explicit) metaphysical

assumptions or ambiguity, (3) have a language that is atheoretical and therefore optimal for use in communicating with occultists of other systems as well as those in other fields such as psychology. We can look at these three benefits in turn to see how the use of phenomenology is advantageous to the aims of Scientific Illuminism.

Firstly, the use of phenomenological language guards against materialistic reductionism by preserving the im-portance of subjective, first-hand experience. This may, in part, help to convince those who believe we are simply "explaining away" everything that we do in fact have a respect for the lived experience of occult phenomena. Some very basic examples may help explain this concept further. A complete physiological explanation of the process of visually perceiving something red (which involves describing the stimulus, parts of the eye, nerves, parts of the visual cortex, etc.) still does not capture the experience of the redness of that thing. This is related to the idea that it is impossible to convey what red is to someone who is blind: giving them the complete physiological description will still leave out the actual experience of redness. Another example is that a complete physiological explanation of pain doesn't capture the experience of the feeling of pain itself. These reductionistic accounts leave out a crucial aspect of the experience or what some may argue is the most crucial: the subjective or "what it's like" part of experience. This is not to say that psychological or physiological explanations are therefore wrong but it does say that, at least with our current understanding, there is a limit to these explanations in that they leave out something about consciousness or experience (namely, what it is like to have that experience). We account for this neither by discarding the psycho-physiological explanations nor discarding first-person accounts but by acknowledging that they both are needed – at least at this time in the history of science and philosophy – to get the fullest picture of what is really happening. As the philosopher Daniel Dennett has explained of this approach, "It leaves out no objective phenomena and no subjective phenomena of consciousness."

Secondly, the use phenomenological language will, ideally, condition or train us to understand our experience without implicit (or explicit) metaphysical assumptions or ambiguity. This is because phenomenological accounts are atheoretical – this means that they subscribe to no particular

theory of how these experiences came to be or what they really are. For example, compare the statement “I attained nirvana” with its various metaphysical and moral baggage with “There was an experience where the normal sense of identification or ownership of a 'self' as well as the distinction between that self and the world had fallen away.” The first statement is both ambiguous and loaded with assumptions. It is ambiguous because nirvana is often a very vaguely defined concept on top of the fact that many different Buddhists have many different interpretations and explanations of it. It is full of assumptions in that the concept of nirvana is tied up with the entire Buddhist system. We assume the truth of its metaphysical notions such as anicca (impermanence), reincarnation, samsara (the world of birth, death, and rebirth), and karma, as well as a particular psychology (self as insubstantial) and moral beliefs (release from desire and attachment is good, suffering is bad). By speaking phenomenologically, we describe the experience as it is experienced without any theoretical assumptions. To be clear, this also includes the theoretical assumption of naturalism. Note how, in the example above, the phenomenological explication uses absolutely no physiological or psychological explanations: things are simply reported as they are experienced. Explanation comes, if ever, after the fact. Phenomenology is therefore a crucial way in which we preserve the first-hand experience of the individual rather than simply “explaining away” everything in psychological or physiological terms. We retain the subjective experience in our phenomenological language and then, after this, we can give naturalistic, i.e. psycho-physiological, explanations to how or why these experiences occurred. As mentioned before, it is in this way that we don't leave out any objective or subjective phenomena.

Finally, the use of this phenomenological language is atheoretical and therefore optimal for use in communicating with occultists of other systems as well as those in other fields such as psychology. Two people who are speaking about the same thing might have different language and theories about it and therefore be unable to communicate. For example: If we say that “I invoked the chthonic energies of Geb” we might have no way to understand someone who says “I summoned the spirits of the Gnomes to aid me” even if what the experience actually involved was similar or even identical. As an another example, someone might say “I am the Light of the

World" or "she has become a bodhisattva" or "he has delusions of grandiosity," all of which involve implicit and often incompatible theories yet might very well be speaking about the same phenomenological experience. By speaking phenomenologically we avoid these pitfalls. In the case of this example, we may perhaps say, "There was a sense of my purpose being to serve the rest of humanity that felt intense and innately true without any kind of argument." This is the phenomenological account. Now we can take a step back and say, "That means you are the Light of the World" (a Christian account), "you are a bodhisattva" (a Buddhist account), "you have delusions of grandiosity" (a psychologist's account), or "the circuits involved in meaning-making in your brain were activated" (a naturalistic account). By using phenomenological language, all of these people who subscribe to different theories can communicate with one another and be more clear about what is actually happening instead of using vague words that we assume to mean similar things (e.g. astral energy, bodhisattva, demons, Sephiroth, etc.)

The approach of Naturalistic Occultism is therefore very specific. We account for subjectivity through phenomenology and give objective explanations through naturalism. We privilege the use of phenomenological language for recording results in the Magical Record and for communication between practitioners. When giving explanations of the causes and nature of these experiences, we privilege naturalistic, scientific theories.

# Chapter 6 – On Pragmatism

As it has been said before, Naturalistic Occultism is an approach to occult phenomena through the philosophical foundations of naturalism, empiricism, and pragmatism. This last term, pragmatism, can be explained in more depth and hopefully you will understand how fundamentally important this approach can be.

Pragmatism is an approach to truth. To be very simplistic, it holds that what is "true" is what is useful. Aleister Crowley gave a concise explanation of pragmatism when he wrote, "Maximum Convenience is our canon of Truth." The pragmatic approach to occultism was pioneered by Crowley. He gives a beautiful summary of this view in his introductory text to learning ceremonial rituals, Liber O:

*"In this book it is spoken of the Sephiroth and the Paths; of Spirits and Conjurations; of Gods, Spheres, Planes, and many other things which may or may not exist. It is immaterial whether these things exist or not. By doing certain things certain results will follow; students are most earnestly warned against attributing objective reality or philosophic validity to any of them."*

I cannot claim to give a better definition of the pragmatic approach to occultism, but I will attempt to explain it further. Pragmatism basically says, "By doing X, we get Y, and because this process works it is therefore 'true,' although we may not attribute objective reality or philosophical validity to X or Y." For example, by meditating on the Sephiroth of Netzach (X), we may increase our understanding of love (Y). This says nothing about how doing X leads to Y, i.e. the manner in which the meditation leads to greater understanding. It also says nothing about how we are to understand X or Y, i.e. the nature of Netzach (X) or love (Y). Pragmatically, we did certain things (X) and certain results (Y) followed.

Another example is in the field of quantum mechanics. There is a formula, $\psi^2$, which gives a practical way to determine the probability of finding a particle at a particular position. It is a useful formula, but it says nothing

about what is actually happening. In fact, the nature of things at the quantum level has and still is a topic of fierce debate, yet people can acknowledge the pragmatic truth (or, in other words, the utility) of the equation $\psi^2$ without concerning themselves with the objective reality or philosophical validity of whatever explanations they might give of what is occurring at the quantum level.

As mentioned before, the pragmatic approach is basically, “By doing certain things certain results will follow.” In our practice, we are essentially asking, “what are these 'certain things' we must do to achieve the results desired?” or, more simply, “what do we need to do for this to work?” A convenient way to do this is to classify which actions (physical movements), speech (vocalizations), and thoughts (mental operations in general, including visualization) are involved in the practice. This approach can be a little “clunky” when communicating with others in that it takes a lot of time to write out or say exactly what actions, speech, and thoughts are involved in the practice. This is why we may retain the use of occult language to use as a kind of “occult shorthand” when communicating with others while retaining our pragmatic understanding of their import. An example will hopefully help clarify what is meant by this.

Let us suppose that we are doing a Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, focusing specifically (for convenience of this illustration) on the section that entails the invocation of the four Archangels in the four quarters. The invocation of the Archangels involves certain physical movements or actions (in this case, standing with your feet together and arms extended to form the shape of a cross, otherwise known as the “sign of Osiris Slain”), certain vocalizations (“Before me stands Raphael...”), and certain thoughts or visualizations (e.g. the visualization of Raphael in front of you in the Eastern quarter, holding a dagger, clothed in yellow and purple garments). The pragmatic approach means not believing in the objective reality (i.e. that the Archangels are actual entities that exist in the world) or philosophical validity (i.e. that Archangels are part of an accurate hierarchy of angelic beings) of these things. Rather, by doing certain things (the actions, speech, and thoughts involved), certain results follow. That is, the practice is judged solely on the basis of its leading to the desired result. Whether the Archangels objectively exist or if the angelic hierarchy is

accurate or real have absolutely nothing to do with our pragmatic approach. These things don't matter to us; what matters is whether the process known as “invoking the Archangels” produces the desired results.

On top of this, we may still use “occult shorthand” to refer to this process as “the invocation of the Archangels” while simultaneously understanding the meaning of this phrase in pragmatic terms, e.g. “the invocation of the Archangels pragmatically means performing actions A and B, vocalizing C and D, and visualizing E and F, all to get results G and H.” In this way we can communicate with others efficiently while maintaining a pragmatic understanding of the components involved in the practice.

In Naturalistic Occultism, we give precedence to naturalistic explanations of the nature of the methods and results as well as their relationship to each other, attempting to understand them physiologically and/or psychologically. The pragmatic approach helps us remember that our naturalistic explanations are provisional or tentative – they are ways we currently may understand the phenomena although new data or theories may cause us to reconsider and adapt our explanations. We may know pragmatically that X leads to Y while also recognizing that our naturalistic interpretations of X and Y (and why X leads to Y) may change in time.

This approach may also allow us to be more humble and understanding in our conversations with other occultists. For example, someone might say “I projected into the fourth level of the astral plane and conversed with the Archangel Gabriel.” Instead of saying “you are crazy, idiotic, uninformed, naïve, and ignorant” we might acknowledge that this person performed various things that caused various results (namely, a phenomenological experience) that they happen to explain in this way. We might even learn something from this person in asking about their methods and trying it out ourselves, leaving them to their interpretations that we may perceive as superstitious and focusing our energy on understanding these phenomena naturalistically.

In closing this section, I cannot recommend enough that Naturalistic Occultists read and re-read the quotation from Crowley that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. In formulating our practices, we would do well to return to this quotation with its emphasis on results rather than the objective

reality or philosophical validity of occult ideas. As it has been said, “Success is your proof.”

# Chapter 7 – A Summary of our Approach

Now we have all of the fundamental components of Naturalistic Occultism's approach to the theory and practice of occultism. We can formulate this approach in 4 steps:

1. The pragmatic formulation of the practice or methods.

2. The performance of the practice itself.

3. The phenomenological recording of the practice and its results.

4. The naturalistic explanation or interpretation of the practice and its results.

The topics of the previous chapters fit together in this 4-fold approach. For these 4 steps, we can see that the first uses pragmatism (see chapter 6), the second is the practice itself, the third uses phenomenology (see chapter 5), and the fourth uses naturalism (see chapter 1 and the entire “Theory” section of this book). Let's briefly go through each of these steps in order to make sure we have a clear understanding of the entire process of this approach.

The first step is the pragmatic formulation of the practice or methods. We are asking, “What actions, vocalizations, and mental operations are needed to produce the desired results?” The formulation of these necessary conditions are judged purely on the basis of whether they lead to these desired results.

The second step is the performance of the practice itself. That is, we perform the various acts of movement, speech, and thought which we have previously formulated.

The third step is the recording of our practice and its consequent results in phenomenological language. This involves reporting whatever occurred as it was experienced, without any theoretical, philosophical, or metaphysical language beyond the raw experience. We should also record important

factors such as the time of day, our mental/emotional states (especially when they change before, during, or after the operation), the duration of the practice, how tired we were, etc.

The fourth step is the interpretation or explanation of the practice and its results in naturalistic terms. This refers to the use of psychological and/or physiological language to give a theoretical understanding of what-ever transpired. We are in agreement that, "We ought to approach the occult arts in the same spirit in which we approach any other phenomena. They are not supernatural, they break no natural laws; they are merely comparatively rare and little understood. As soon as we understand their rationale they cease to be supernatural and become natural."

This is the basic approach of Naturalistic Occultism to the practice of occultism: (1) pragmatism in formulating the practice (whatever works best is "truest"), (2) the performance of the practice itself, (3) the phenomenological recording of the results to preserve the first-hand experience of the individual in atheoretical language, and (4) naturalistic interpretations of the phenomena involved to understand the phenomena scientifically. Now, with the weapon of pragmatism, girded by the method of phenomenological reporting, and guided by the light of naturalistic understanding, we may approach our practice with new eyes.

Virtually all of the next section ("Theory") deals with step 4. We can now begin to examine naturalistic explanations of various occult phenomena.

# Chapter 8 – As Above, So Below - As Within, So Without

People often quote “As above, so below” in defense of the idea that man is a microcosm of the macrocosm, which is most likely a throwback to the idea that God created humans in his image. What is more likely is that the microcosm – the human organism – takes in sensory input through its senses, interprets those stimuli, and produces what we understand of ourselves and our world.

Because of the evolutionary structure of the human nervous system we are – for the most part – conditioned to interpret stimuli in a relatively uniform way. One of these ways is that we project the nature of our own psyches onto the world around us. We see faces in clouds, see earthly animals and items in the stars, we organizes spaces in (seemingly arbitrary) groups, we anthropomorphize forces of nature, etc. This means that the microcosm – the human organism, specifically the organization of its nervous system – actually projects or superimposes the organization of its perceptual systems onto the world around it (the macrocosm): The macrocosm is actually a reflection of the microcosm! As William Blake said, “Men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast,” although we might amend this to say they reside in the human brain. The apparent organization of the world is a reflection or product of the organization of the nervous system. Or: As within, so without.

This conception naturally leads to the idea that the entire perceptible universe is actually a phantasm or illusion created by the nervous system, but we perceive the world in a relatively stable way. We work with various assumptions and perceptual frames that are a result of the organization of the nervous system, and, after all, the “phantasm” of the world that the nervous system creates is all of which we can possibly be aware. Therefore, even if the world is an “illusion,” it is a relatively stable illusion and it is all we have. The various ways we perceive the world may have no basis in objective reality beyond the perception generated by the nervous system. For example, there is no “color” in the world but our eyes interpret

wavelengths of electromagnetic energy and an experience of “red” or “green” emerges. The same may be true about our perceptions of time and space: they may simply be a convenient way for the nervous system to organize stimuli. In short, our reality may be full of “illusions” or an illusion itself, but we must work with these illusions. As Nietzsche wrote, “The conditions of life might contain error,” meaning the assumptions we have about our world may be illusions, but that doesn't mean they aren't useful.

This is one more way in which we may approach these matters in the spirit the pragmatism. As Crowley has said, “Maximum Convenience is our canon of Truth.”37 Pragmatically, that means you can work with an assumption while acknowledging it may be an illusion in the end of analysis. In this case, the various ways we organize our experience can be understood to not be objectively true yet also personally useful. Again: “Success is your proof.”38 It is in this same spirit that we judge ceremonial rituals not on their particular symbolism, correspondences, organization, secret formulas or words, etc., but instead on their effectiveness in obtaining desired results.

# Chapter 9 – The Planets, Zodiac, and other Symbol Schemes: The Psyche's Categorizations and their Conscious Manipulation through Conditioning

In occultism, there are many elaborate systems of correspondences between the man and the world. These systems most likely arise out of the previously mentioned attitude of “As above, so below,” i.e. that the order of the celestial heavens is mirrored in the order of the human microcosm. A fairly universal occult practice is connecting the symbolism of Hebrew letters, Tarot cards, elements, planets, zodiac signs, and numbers. The common understanding of what corresponds to what most likely comes from the “Cipher Manuscripts” of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which was publicized and expanded by Aleister Crowley in 777 and other books. This is where, for example, Aleph = 1 = Atu 0: The Fool = Air. This system of correspondences is different than the attribution scheme given in the Sepher Yetzirah and probably is different from our systems of what symbols of one class correspond with what symbols of another class.

One could argue that the fact that attribution schemes can differ means that the traditional arrangement is arbitrary and superstitious, or one could also argue that this arrangement is the product of the current stage of evolution in a long, dynamic history of human understanding of using symbols to depict the world. Either way, the answer doesn't entirely matter: Every symbol scheme appears to be man attempting to understand the cosmos by arranging all things into various categories.

Empedocles, an ancient Greek philosopher, purportedly started the idea that there are four elements (Earth, Air, Water, and Fire) and a fifth quintessence (Spirit). All things in the world can then be understood in terms of 4 with a fifth quintessence. The planets (occultists tend to use the classical notion of the 7 “planets” of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury as well as the Moon and the star, our Sun) as well as Alice Bailey's seven “rays” and Helena Blavatsky's seven “planes” are examples of the division of all things

into 7 categories. One can also view the Sun as the center or "quintessence" of the 6 surrounding "planets." The zodiac is a division of all things into 12, which can itself be further understood in terms of permutations of the 4 elements previously mentioned. The Hebrew alphabet and the Tarot Trumps are both divisions of all things into 22, which correspond with the 5 elements, 7 planets, and 12 zodiac signs (with Fire and Spirit as well as Saturn and Earth traditionally overlapping on the 20th and 21st Major Arcana of the Tarot, respectively). The Qabalistic Tree of Lief is an understanding of all things in terms of 10 with its own planetary attributions. The I Ching understands all things in terms of 2 (yin and yang) and the 64 permutations of yin and yang in its hexagrams. The Discordian Society also plays on this with their notion of the "Law of Fives."

There are ways of dividing the world up by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, ad infinitum... All of these schemes are about as good or bad as any other. Again: all of the symbol schemes are attempts to understand the world by categorizing it. On this subject Crowley wrote, "The Chinese cannot help thinking that the octave has 5 notes. The more necessary anything appears to my mind, the more certain it is that I only assert a limitation. I slept with Faith, and found a corpse in my arms on awaking; I drank and danced all night with Doubt, and found her a virgin in the morning."

If the magician is searching for liberation from limitations, attachment to certain ideas or mental models can be a limitation. People study the Tree of Life vigorously and attempt to fit everything into the Sephiroth, paths, veils, planets, etc. Everything then becomes a case of "with a hammer in hand, all problems look like nails" or, more aptly, "with the Tree of Life in hand, all problems look like Sephiroth." This is a case where expectations guide perceptions – an all-too-common disposition among occultists as opposed to the reality of our perceptions guiding our expectations.

In this way, we can understand that these symbol schemes – Tarot trumps, the zodiac, rays, planes, Sephiroth, etc. – are all different and ultimately equally valid metaphors. There is no metaphor that can, alone, convey the totality of any reality. All metaphors are attempts at explaining the ultimately ineffable: raw experience in all of its richness. All metaphors are like fingers pointing to the moon, where people too often confuse the finger

for the moon. Or, as Alfred Korzybski said, “the map is not the territory.” However, understanding more symbol schemes or “metaphors” may allow one to appreciate the variety of possibilities in understanding and categorizing the world. Each symbol scheme by itself fails to capture the entire picture, so the more schemes one assimilates, the more one's picture grows (similar to how, to understand a statue, a single photograph may be useful, but photos from multiple angles give a more complete picture).

There is probably no absolute or objective connection between, for example, the Hebrew letter Nun and the Tarot Card “Death.” It is an example of how associations between stimuli or ideas can be intentionally formed and manipulated. Classical conditioning shows us that we can pair unrelated stimuli and make the subject for a natural, often involuntary or automatic association between those stimuli. In Ivan Pavlov's famous experiment, the sound of a ringing bell always preceded the placement of food out for the dogs to eat. The dogs repeatedly heard this series of stimuli (the ringing of the bell and then the food being brought out) and connected them: the result was that the dogs started salivating merely at the sound of the bell, even before the food was in sight.

This basic ideas can be applied to the notion of what is known as the “representative heuristic” or the notion that “like goes with like,” which is the basis of the theory of correspondences between these symbols. Tarot cards and other symbols can refer to and be associated with certain states of consciousness, allowing the magician to manipulate her own awareness. In this case, one can form associations between symbolic ideas and various experiences, and then one can manipulate these associations to intentionally bring about the associates ideas and experiences. For example, if someone wanted to feel martial (i.e. strong, commanding, assertive, and aggressive) and they had studied and memorized the traditional correspondences, by merely surrounding this person with the associated symbols, one could argue that the conditioning to associate these symbols with ideas and feelings of a martial nature causes an altered state of thinking and behaving. This can be enhanced by reading associated literary works, performing associated body positions, smelling associated incenses, singing or hearing associated sounds, etc.

This simple idea that the psyche can be trained to associate various complex symbols systems with various ideas, feelings, objects, moods, etc. can help us understand and use magick in the sense of causing changes in consciousness to occur in conformity with will. Pavlov called this process "classical conditioning," which is a theory about how animals (including humans) learn by association. Here is a crash course: Suppose you want to associate the sound of a lion roaring, along with the emotions of awe and fear that are naturally evoked, with the act of waving your left hand. The sound of a lion would be the unconditioned stimulus (US) and the emotional reaction of awe and fear would be the unconditioned response (UR). The US leads to the UR (US → UR). The waving of your left hand would be the conditioned stimulus (CS). Essentially, by pairing the US (lion's roar) with the CS (left hand waving) repeatedly, the CS starts being associated with the US. Now the US (lion's roar) isn't the only stimulus that produces the UR (awe and fear), the CS (left hand waving) now produces that same response, called the conditioned response (CR). The left hand waving (CS) will produce the feeling of awe and fear (CR) without the need of the lion's roar (US). One could put it like this: (1) US → UR. (2) US + CS → UR. (3) CS → CR.

Theoretically, this idea could be applied in many situations. Some occultists mention "triggers" of out-of-body experiences by connecting the act of "projecting" with, for example, the movement of a finger (the "trigger"). Mystics of all cultures connect their experience of unity with their favorite deity or phrase (God, Jesus, Aum, Vishnu, Thor, ABRAHADABRA, etc.). In this case, the experience of the deity is the unconditioned response (UR) to some activity (prayer, meditation, concentration, etc.) that is the unconditioned stimulus (US), and the name or image of the deity would be the conditioned stimulus (CS). Eventually, by repeatedly hearing the name "Shiva," seeing Odin, or saying some phrase at the same time as having that experience of unity would associate the two stimuli: simply hearing the name or seeing image will lead to the experience of the deity, which would now be the conditioned response (CR). An example of this is that Sri Ramakrishna was said to, at times, go into fits of ecstasy whenever he merely heard the name "Rama" or simply "Om." He had associated the name Rama (CS) so closely with his "Samadhi-consciousness" (UR) that

merely hearing the names triggered this state of mind (CR) without needing to perform devotions (UC).

These are all acts of intentionally, willfully conditioned ourselves to associate two stimuli (finger movement & out-of-body experience; sounds of a name & the experience of unity) so that they may be consciously manipulated. No matter what symbol scheme is used – whether planetary or elemental, whether Christian or Hindu – the possibilities of self-conditioning are limited only by your ingenuity.

# Chapter 10 – Divination: Tarot, I Ching, and Entrails

On the topic of divination, I would first like to begin with a quotation from "The Chaldean Oracles of Zoroaster":

*"Direct not thy mind to the vast surfaces of the Earth; for the Plant of Truth grows not upon the ground. Nor measure the motions of the Sun, collecting rules, for he is carried by the Eternal Will of the Father, and not for your sake alone. Dismiss (from your mind) the impetuous course of the Moon, for she moveth always by the power of necessity. The progression of the Stars was not generated for your sake. The wide aerial flight of birds gives no true knowledge nor the dissection of the entrails of victims; they are all mere toys, the basis of mercenary fraud: flee from these if you would enter the sacred paradise of piety, where Virtue, Wisdom and Equity are assembled."*

This quotation from a purportedly ancient source (Zoroaster) shows an essential identity with the understanding of divination in Naturalistic Occultism. In the past, people used everything from geological formations, plants, celestial movements (astrology), cards (Tarot), patterns of sticks or stones which are thrown or dropped (geomancy, I Ching), the flights of birds, and even "the dissection of the entrails of victims." All of these methods apparently allowed people in the past to divine the future, and today many are often used to divine the nature of an individual.

What we have to realize is that these divinatory methods are essentially anthropocentric (human-centered) and ego-centric (self-centered) understandings of the world around us. This is a case of believing "As above, so below" when it actually a case of "As within, so without." The human mind is, if anything, good at finding patterns. A common example of this is seeing a bunny rabbit in the shape of ever-shifting clouds or seeing animal constellations in the chaotic collection of stars in the night sky. People see these patterns and figures often, but most people would never think these patterns represent some kind of revelation about the future.

When the patterns are seen in a Tarot reading, an I Ching oracle, or some other divinatory method, people tend to claim there is some magical power of fortune telling at work.

Why would human beings see patterns in the entrails of the dead and randomly arranged sticks?

**1. The need to feel in control – The future is always uncertain and therefore a source of anxiety. The belief that the future can be foreseen makes it seem less uncertain and satisfies the need of humans to feel in control. In fact, a recent study (2008) showed there is an intimate relationship between the need to feel in control and the likelihood of perceiving patterns or connections where they do not exist.**

**2. Social proof – Occultists tend to associate with like-minded people, many of whom use divinatory techniques. We tend to believe things that everyone else believes around us, and beliefs are reinforced if we find that others approve, especially true when we are uncertain about the topic.**

**3. Rationalization trap – People often put a lot of time into learning about these methods, using them, and even guiding their lives by their interpretations. People who put a lot of effort into anything engage in "effort justification," where they try to rationalize the large amount of time and/or money put into whatever practice is being questioned.**

**4. Tradition – There are examples of people throughout time using various techniques of divination. The ancient nature of divination is used as a justification by many for its validity, but many old traditions are ambiguous, superstitious, and simply wrong. We practiced human sacrifice for thousands of years – does that validate it? Tradition has held for thousands of years that the Earth was the center of the world and that it was flat – are any of these ideas valid in the least because of their ancientness?**

Divination is an instance where the subjective and objective need to be carefully examined and separated. There is no observable, objective connection between the path of the stars in the sky and personality traits

(just like – as discussed in the previous chapter – there is no objective connection between the symbols of the zodiac, elements, planets, Tarot cards, etc.). As Zoroaster supposedly said, “The progression of the Stars was not generated for your sake.” There is no reason to believe that an I Ching reading can predict the best course of action, that a Tarot reading can accurately portray your mental and emotional needs, or that the observation of the flight of birds or progression of planets can give insight or predict the future.

One way to understand why Tarot and other “psychic” or divinatory practices seem to “work” is through the idea of Barnum statements. A Barnum statement is an ambiguous and general statement that can and is taken to be personally meaningful. As an interesting example of this, the famous skeptic James Randi once took a classroom of students and distributed astrological horoscopes to each person. He had the students read the horoscopes over and then rate their accuracy on a scale of 1 (not accurate) to 5 (very accurate). Almost every person rated their horoscope as a “5” for accuracy, with a few rating it “4,” but here comes the catch... Randi asked the students to pass their horoscope to the people in front of them and judge the accuracy of other people's readings. The students found that everyone had been distributed the exact same horoscope!

Again, the reason this works is because of Barnum statements. The horoscope contained ambiguous and general statements that almost anyone could agree with, e.g. “I see myself as being mostly self-reliant.” These ambiguous statements are taken as personally meaningful to the person reading a horoscope even though they could (and do) apply to many, many people.

But this doesn't mean these divinatory systems don't necessarily have subjective value. There are never any rigid, objective meanings for Tarot cards or divinations; they always require the personal, subjective interpretation and application of the symbols. This can be embraced insofar as the interpreter understands that the meanings that arise out of the reading are largely a result of their psyche imposing order and meaning on the symbols. The innate pattern-finding drive in human organisms can be bent to the will of the magician. Suppose a person is feeling depressed, doesn't

know what to do, and so consults the I Ching for advice. The sticks form some hexagram or another and suggest an ambiguous course of action with vague, often symbolic or metaphorical language. The person consulting this divination could, using the correspondences (mentioned in the previous chapter) they have learned along with their intuition, decide that the hexagram means they should go out for a walk and engage with friends. The person molds the essentially arbitrary divination to "fit" their life and current situation. In short, a divination may suggest a course of action to help overcome indecision.

A problem with divinatory systems, especially astrology, is the pigeonholing of people into various categories. Most people think it wouldn't be very valid to judge a person based on their sex (sexism), race (racism), age (ageism), etc. Why would it be any more valid to judge a person based on their "Sun sign"? (Signism, perhaps?) I still vividly remember walking down the street with a female friend and we came upon someone at the corner of a street who had studied occultism for decades. He inquired what sign she was and, when she answered "Scorpio," he recoiled and hissed. Although it was a playful response, it was obvious that he was judging her based on her Sun sign even when he had literally known her for about 30 seconds. This seems just as prejudicial as anything else.

People learn symbol systems and their associated characteristics like the twelve symbols of the zodiac and then pigeonhole people into categories. It's a case of "With astrology in hand, everyone looks like their sun sign." This is because of a cognitive bias known in psychology as "confirmation bias," which is the tendency to interpret new information as justifying and affirming preconceived beliefs. With our pattern-finding tendencies and our confirmation bias hand in hand, everyone is liable to see patterns where they don't exist and constantly fit new information into pre-conceived beliefs and categories. When a person who is an "Aries" acts in a robust, energetic manner we say, "he is such an Aries," but when this person is emotional or intellectual, astrologists can explain this by saying, "but her Moo is in Cancer" or "he has an aspect (a spatial relation between celestial bodies) which predisposes her to be emotional and intellectual" or "there is a conjunction of Venus and Mercury this week that explains all of this." In short, there are nearly infinite ways to justify people's temperaments and

actions with the many variables of astrology, but this is all a case of confirmation bias... and unfortunately in too many cases, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

People may view themselves primarily as Leos and therefore devote their pursuits to what they view as “Leo-like”: being creative, friendly, boastful, etc. This can even lead to avoiding certain people because of their Sun signs (e.g. “Oh, you Scorpios – you're always trouble!”) without even knowing anything about them. But what if you viewed yourself as a Gemini or a Sagittarius for a week? You would slowly but inevitably see the things that you do which are Gemini-like or Sagittarian. Speaking symbolically, everyone is a star which, like the Sun, travels through all twelve zodiac signs: every person has a bit of Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces in them, though some may be more outwardly emphasized than others in certain people. Also, people change slowly over time and often dramatically in response to extreme conditions, e.g. a soldier might get Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and retract themselves from the world... but does that make him now a Virgo? If the magician wishes to be free from limitations, ridding yourself of the mental limitation of pigeonholing people into an astrological scheme might be a good place to start.

In short, Naturalistic Occultism views divination of all sorts as objectively arbitrary but potentially meaningful and helpful in a subjective way. Allowing the psyche's natural pattern-finding ability to work on the ambiguous, symbolic “answers” of divination can allow for the individual to see new perspectives on problems or perhaps suggest a certain course of action to the diviner's mind. What has to be remembered is that these are subjective tools. All too often, occultists fall into the trap of letting the cards (or sticks, or whatever else) guide their destiny instead of themselves. Also, occultists all-too-often take divinatory symbols to refer to objective reality and so begin to pigeonhole other people (and events and other things) into relatively arbitrary categories. If the occultist can avoid these pitfalls, divination can be a personally meaningful, interesting, and even illuminating practice.

# Chapter 11 – Gematria: Finding Patterns in Numbers

The previous chapters (chapters 10 and 11) have looked at how occult, symbolic classification systems and divinatory practices are often guided and reinforced by "confirmation bias." Again, confirmation bias is a cognitive tendency that we all have to fit facts to preconceived conclusions (or classification systems) while excluding or ignoring the facts that don't "fit." A prominent example of this confirmation bias is the widespread practice of "gematria" in occult circles.

Gematria is essentially the practice of adding up words, phrases, names, and "magical formulas" (such as LAShTAL, IAO, IHVH, ABRAHADABRA, etc.) to find corresponding numerical values. This requires languages that assign numerical equivalents to their letters. The most commonly used are Hebrew and Greek (where the practice is called "isopsephy"), most likely reinforced by the fact that the Old and New Testaments use these two languages, respectively.

The main contention in this chapter is that these systems of gematria, along with their "results," are largely if not entirely arbitrary in an objective sense. As mentioned in other chapters, an objective, absolute significance or meaning does not exclude a relativistic, subjective significance. Something can be subjectively meaningful without everyone else agreeing on its significance or "Truth." I would like to make three arguments against the objectivity of the practice and results of gematria.

First of all, the different systems of gematria that are already established – Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, etc. – have different numerical attributions for the same sounds/letters. This immediately suggests there isn't some objective, absolute correlation between certain sounds/letters and certain numbers. For example, the number 60 is attribute to the Greek letter Xi while it is attributed to the Hebrew letter Samekh; the number 90 is attributed to the Greek letter Coph and the Hebrew letter Tzaddi; the number 100 is attributed to the Greek letter Rho and the Hebrew letter Qoph, etc. Also,

Greek has letters that are attributed to numbers (Phi, Chi, Psi, Omega, and Sanpi) for which Hebrew has no equivalent (so they use “final letters,” which means that the Hebrew letters takes on this new number when it is used at the end of a word... which is a point that is often ignored when convenient!). Further, it is obvious that different languages have different words for the same ideas – the Hebrew word for something is not the same as the Greek word for the same thing, let alone the same “gematria value.”

Second of all, people often set out with an idea in hand and then the facts are fit into that preconceived notion (“confirmation bias,” as previously mentioned). This results in attributing different letters in different places (e.g. using Tav as a Hebrew transliteration for “T” in one place and using Teth in another), dropping certain letters, adding letters that are close but not exact (e.g. using the Hebrew letter Heh for “E”), and other practices which should clue in the person that the result is relatively spurious. People look for significant numbers (e.g. in Thelema, the numbers 11, 31, 56, 93, 156, 418, and 666 are particularly significant) and then mess with words to obtain these.

A recent example (from 2008) that was most likely done in jest but still illustrates this point was the equating of Sarah Palin's name to 666. This was done by first transliterating Sarah Palin's name into Hebrew, and then dropping two of the “A”s in her first name and the “I” in her last name arbitrarily. This makes her name become SRH PALN = 300+200+5+80+1+30+50 = 666. Why was the “A” retained in the last name but not the first name? Why was the Hebrew letter “Shin” used as a transliteration of “S” instead of Samekh? Why wasn't the “final letter” attribution of Nun used (making Nun equal 700 instead of 50)? Because that wouldn't make Sarah Palin's name equal 666, of course! Although this example was probably done humorously, it highlights a basic practice of “gematricians” of all types. How is this anything but the arbitrary fitting-of-facts into preconceived expectations?

Third of all, the equivalence between two words with equal numerical totals are rather arbitrary. For example, many people are exposed to the idea that “Unity” and “Love” are both equal to 13 in Hebrew (Unity = AChD =13; Love = AHBH = 13) and therefore share some kind of common meaning.

Do many people also realize that the word for “Hated” in Hebrew is equal to 13 (Hated = AIB = 13)? Do people contemplate how Love and Hated are equal? A common practice in gematria is to take a word or a number and look up words with equivalent numerical values, often in Aleister Crowley's “Sepher Sephiroth” that can be found in 777 and other Qabalistic Writings. The fact is that people often ignore the meanings they don't think fit with the ideas they are currently working with and reaffirm the meanings which they think do fit – confirmation bias again!

The fact that an attribution of a number to a letter in an alphabet is required for the practice of gematria to take place has led many people to create an “English Qabalah” or system of numerical attributions for the letters of the English language. This is most likely due to the natural attempt of applying the principles of gematria to one's own language as well as the injunction in Thelema's central text that, “Thou shalt obtain the order & value of the English Alphabet; thou shalt find new symbols to attribute them unto” (along with the egotistical drive to be acknowledge as the “child” or heir of Crowley). Either way, there are many versions of English gematria that have appeared over the years. The problem here is a similar one to the fact that Hebrew and Greek give different numerical attributions to the same letters. Every “English Qabalah” is different, and therefore all of their attributions are different as well as the numerical equivalences between words.

This doesn't mean that there is no validity at all to the practice of gematria. Much like in the case of a Tarot reading, seeing apparently disconnected ideas, images, words or numbers allows the natural human proclivity to find patterns to work. Contemplation of how “Hated” and “Love” are equivalent concepts may lead to some kind of moral or metaphysical realization. Generally, trying to think of a link between any two apparently disconnected ideas may lead to some interesting considerations and insights. Along with the idea that numbers can help us manifest our natural pattern-finding proclivity, the practice of gematria can also be seen as beneficial in the sense that it can be understood as part of our work of turning the world of dross into gold (or “spiritualizing the mundane” or some other equivalent metaphor). That is, the practice of gematria, and Qabalah in general, can help you see the importance and divinity of all

numbers, reminding us of our initiatory pursuits of self-realization while in "mundane" settings.

That all being said, many people utilize gematria to find some kind of hidden, objective meaning in the Scriptures, to find out who the Antichrist is (Nero! Aleister Crowley! Barry Goldwater! Sarah Palin!), to uncover hidden mystical meanings of words, etc. What we should guard against is proclaiming the "truths" or interesting equivalences that we find personally significant as some kind of Universal Truth.

# Chapter 12 – Why Magick Seems to Work

This chapter looks at why acts of magick might seem to work. Claims like "magick works" or "magick doesn't work" will not be made. Rather, the reasons why occultists may tend to view their results as successful are investigated. It should be reaffirmed once more that there is a difference between subjective and objective results. If your invocation, for example, gives you a feeling of ecstasy, then you have a real feeling of ecstasy. As explained earlier, an "actual" pain and a hallucination of pain still feel the same way: painful. That being said, most occultists make claims about objective changes in the world: their sigils caused them to find a girlfriend, their chanting caused them to heal the sick, their Jupiterian ritual lead to finding a job, etc. Discarding for the moment the consideration of whether these rituals actually cause objective changes or not, we may ask: Why might people believe that they have caused objective changes in the world through their rituals?

As mentioned many times already, our good friend "confirmation bias" is relevant here. People see what they expect to see and ignore or discount those things which don't fit into their preconceived expectations. Suppose a person casts a sigil with the intention of getting more friends. After this, that person will put a significant emphasis on those encounters where people are friendly and approving towards her and will ignore those situations where people shun and are insulting to her (much like how people will remember their gematria "hits" and forget all about the calculations which ended in nothing "significant"). How many rituals are done with certain intended results which never come about? It is a common tendency of psychics to make hundreds if not thousands of predictions but then consequently focus in on the one or two "hits" while ignoring the hundreds of "misses."

Is it the same situation with ritual magick? People perform hundreds of rituals, forget about the ones that never turn out as planned, and then remember and constantly retell those times when the results were a "hit." Further, this kind of focus on those situations that corroborate the original ritual's intentions tend to lead people to ignore the necessary circumstances that brought about the "desired result." Would you have ever made those

new friends without deciding to go to that party or that bar? Are these people literally being drawn by your magick or are you now acting in a more accepting and gregarious manner? This leads into another idea: the placebo effect.

The placebo effect is well known in medical circles: a patient will be given a placebo treatment (e.g. a sugar pill) and will be told that it will alleviate some condition they have. Because of the patient's belief in the efficacy of the treatment (without knowing that they've only been given a pill filled with sugar), they often see significant improvement and results. Usually the belief or expectation that the placebo medicine will help leads to altered behavior in the patient which can account for the actual improvement. Returning to the example given above, was the dramatized desire to find new friends (encapsulated in the sigil-casting ritual) actually causing people to like you, be drawn to you, and want to be around you more, or did this instead cause you yourself to become more friendly, open, and agreeable?

Could these rituals be understood as self-administered placebos? If that is the case, we can affirm the subjective results of magick while being skeptical of any kind of objective results (such as people being physically drawn to a pub because of your ritual). In this sense, the sigil-casting example was different only by a matter of degrees from the “ritual” of “dressing for success,” i.e. taking a shower, putting on smart-looking clothes, and fixing your hair before going out. They both give a subjective sense of confidence that will encourage certain behaviors (in this case, being sociable and likeable) and therefore help you obtain the desired result of getting more friends.

The world is an unfathomably complex place with extremely intricate situations. Because humans tend to like having an explainable account of how things came about, occultists often turn to the simplistic, “my magick caused it to occur.” We should remain skeptical of the objective effects of magick, especially where a nearly infinite amount of variables need to be accounted for and are simply ignored in the face of the simpler explanation that, “the ritual made it happen.” Hopefully, this kind of view will allow occultists to more clearly understand their methods instead of depending

upon chance occurrences to confirm beliefs and to be more careful about the claims about the power of magick and their own “powers.”

# Chapter 13 – Magick and Synchronicity

Many people who have practiced magick in one form or another often come upon a similar experience. This experience is characterized by seeing uncanny connections, things that don't seem like they could have happened by chance. For example, one may invoke Jupiter and then see an ad for "Jupiter restaurant and bar" the next day, realize the book they just ordered is published by "Jove books," and constantly see Jupiter's numbers appearing everywhere (perhaps catching the clock at 4:44 consistently). What could possibly account for these strange coincidences?

One possibility that could account for some of these phenomena is simple selective perception. Selective perception is a cognitive bias that everyone has: we all focus on things that suit our needs or fulfill our expectations (confirmation bias is a form of this). For example, if we are going to a movie theater and expect people to be loud and noisy, chances are we will focus in on those few people who confirm our expectations rather than the many quiet people. In performing a ritual, we are essentially priming ourselves to a particular form of selective perception.

This doesn't necessarily "explain away" the phenomenon but rather gives us framework within which we can work. A Naturalistic Occultist could very well view these uncanny connections as stemming from selective perception but could thereby make use of the principle in an intentional way. We can see a ritual as the intentional priming of our implicit memory to allow us to selectively perceive anything related to the original "stimulus" (in the example above, the stimulus would be Jupiter). If we want to increase the "jovial energy" in our lives, it would make perfect sense to alter your nervous system to attend to Jupiter-related stimuli.

A concept that is obviously related is Carl Jung's notion of synchronicity. Synchroncity attempts to explain "temporally coincident occurrences of acausal events." This means synchronicity tries to account for things that occur at the same or similar time but could not have caused each other. Going back to the example above, there is really no possible way that – according to our understanding of the laws of causality – the ad for "Jupiter

restaurant and bar" could have been placed as a direct effect of the ritual, nor could the book published by "Jove books" have been caused by the ritual or the restaurant ad. Jung would have classified these sort of "meaningful coincidences" under the term synchronicity. Most of the examples that Jung gives are where people see these uncanny coincidences completely unintentionally. A magician, on the other hand, would intentionally prime the unconscious through ritual. Jung mentions in his book Man and his Symbols that the language of the unconscious is that of symbols or an "emotionally charged pictorial language." It should be plainly obvious that ceremonial ritual is in a very natural place to "communicate" with the unconscious in this way. In fact, we might even consider a definition of ritual as the intentional manipulation of emotionally charged symbolism.

As Naturalistic Occultists, we therefore don't need to ignore or dismiss these uncanny connections or "meaningful coincidences" that occur. We may understand them not as messages from gods on Olympus, astral spirits, or God Herself, but rather as the result of priming of our implicit memory to selectively perceive or attend to certain classes of stimuli. We might also define the process as the intentional infusing of and communication with our unconscious with certain stimuli using emotionally charged symbolism in order to generate synchronicities. In fact, were we to experience synchronicities, we might consider this evidence that our ritual was successful, i.e. that the ritual was successful in priming our unconscious with the intended stimulus or symbol. By reorienting our understanding of these strange occurrences as evidence of a successful priming of our unconscious instead of as evidence of supernatural beings or forces, we may reasonably accommodate these phenomena in a naturalistic framework.

# Chapter 14 – Psychotherapy and Initiation

Is it possible that the aims of "initiation" in occultism are similar or even identical to the aims of psychotherapy? First of all, one has to wonder what is meant by "initiation" in the first place. Secondly, there are many forms of psychotherapy, each with their own aims and methods for achieving those aims.

Let's deal with initiation first. A two-fold definition is needed: (1) Initiation is the attainment of a certain state of consciousness, known as enlightenment, "the consciousness of the continuity of existence," the union of subject and object, the union of microcosm and macrocosm, the obtaining of the Stone of the Philosophers, the uniting of the soul with God, union with God, Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, the return to Kether, "the dissolution of the Self in the Infinite," "the process by which a man comes to learn that unknown Crown," etc. There are many metaphors and terms used for this phenomenon, but we may call it the perception in a person's consciousness where all things in the universe are considered as a unitary, continuous phenomenon (the terms "unity" and "non-duality" both express this in positive and negative senses, respectively). This is explored in more depth in chapter 18.

The second part of the definition of initiation in occultism always consists in, as stated in the first chapter, (2) the continuous "the de-conditioning (i.e. overcoming mental and behavioral habits) and then reconditioning of the human nervous system in accordance with the volition of the organism"; it is the self-discipline of the aspirant – through the continual cultivation of health and strength in mind and body through austerities – and the exploring of the occult ("hidden") regions of the mind. This is signified in traditions of occultism by the Serpent of Wisdom climbing the ten Sephiroth of the Tree of Life from Malkuth to Kether, the building of the Pyramid, the removal of dross to find gold, or the chiseling or forming of the rough ashlar/stone into the perfect ashlar. In the Golden Dawn and A∴A∴, for example, the person is given various tasks at each "grade," or level, that may consist of various exercises, readings, and tests to broaden their knowledge and power in various ways. One might metaphorically

understand this as the purification and strengthening of the psyche to allow Divinity (here understood as a word for that "consciousness of the continuity of existence") to more completely manifest in the individual. It can also be understood more generally as the actualization of the individual's potential through self-discipline and exploration of the self.

To summarize, there are two main meanings of "initiation":

1. "Spiritual attainment" or "spiritual experience," the attainment of a certain state of consciousness, known as enlightenment or the "mystic attainment" (see chapter 18) and many other names, involving the consciousness of the unity of all things and one's identity with that unity.

2. "Spiritual progress" whereby we release or actualize our potential through the continuous processes of the de-conditioning (i.e. overcoming mental and behavioral habits) and then reconditioning of the human nervous system in accordance with the volition of the organism, self-maintenance through self-discipline, and self-enhancement through various psycho-physical exercises.

Both of these definitions can be understood under the general idea of "making the unconscious conscious." The first definition, spiritual experience, might be understood as the release of unconscious potencies that lead to the experience known as the mystic attainment (see chapter 18). The second definition, spiritual progress, might be understood as the gradual release and exploration of the unconscious, whereby we integrate, bit by bit, the unconscious material into conscious awareness. Psychotherapy primarily corresponds to the second definition of initiation, though it also might be said to aim more generally at making the unconscious conscious like both of these definitions of initiation.

There are really too many forms of psychotherapy to go through them all in any kind of depth in this chapter, but here are some instances that show the connections between initiation in the field of occultism and psychotherapy in the field of psychology.

Psychotherapy began with the psychodynamic theories of Freud regarding the unconscious, ego, id, superego, Oedipus complex, dream analysis, free

association, pleasure principle, reality principle, life drive, death drive, defense mechanisms, and more. Psychotherapy for Freud meant teasing out the unconscious complexes in a person to understand the source of neuroses. By doing this, the patient gains insight into his or her unconscious and learns to work through their neuroses by examining them and understanding their effects on his or her life. In short, the Freudian analyst believes, "The only final and effective way of [removing debilitating neurotic problems] is to help the patient achieve insight... total understanding of the unconscious determinants of those irrational feelings, thoughts, or behaviors that are producing one's personal misery. Once these unconscious reasons are fully confronted and understood, the need for neurotic defenses and symptoms will disappear." How different is this from what occultists attempt to do through their various practices and exercises? The unconscious is released and explored through various methods of occultists, and then they must necessarily attempt to assimilate these new feelings, experiences, and bits of insights into their lives. Crowley would have probably called this process "love under will"; a Hermeticist might say they are making sure the foundations of the Pyramid are strong. Insight into our unconscious functioning allows us to to become aware of and de-condition various attitudes and then recondition the nervous system in conformity with will so that we might more fully actualize the potential that lies within us. Just as Freud used dream analysis and free association in order to explore and understand "the unconscious determinants of those irrational feelings, thoughts, or behaviors" in his patients, occultists use methods such as invocation, evocation, scrying, lucid dreaming, and other methods in order to "make the unconscious conscious."

Carl Jung was a disciple of Freud but eventually split away from him ideologically. The differences are many and explained in many books, but a primary difference was the introduction of the idea of the collective unconscious and its associated ideas such as archetypes. For Jung, the "collective unconscious" was understood to mean that, because humans are physiologically similar and since their psyches arise from their bodies, everyone's psyche has a similar structure. Since the psyche's structure is similar across all humans, the structure of the unconscious part of the psyche must be similar. Because of this, Jung viewed dreams as not simply the products of wish fulfillment and sexual dysfunction as Freud did, but

rather he saw them as conscious reflections of the unconscious state of the individual. Occultists work with dreams and “astral visions,” which might be seen as the conscious attempt to release and understand these unconscious symbols to better understand ourselves. It is yet another example of the actualization of one's potential as in the second part of the definition of initiation. Further, just as Jung searched through religion and mythology in order to understand the archetypes of the unconscious, occultists also engage in the exploration of archetypes, most obviously in the common use of the Tarot. The use of invocation (see chapter 17) can be seen as the conscious and intentional exploration of these archetypes.

Another important Jungian concept was “individuation,” which he defined as:

*“becoming an 'in-dividual,' and in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization'... Egotists are called 'selfish,' but this, naturally, has nothing to do with the concept of 'self' as I am using it here... Individuation, therefore, can only mean a process of psychological development that fulfills the individual qualities given; in other words, it is a process by which a man becomes the definite, unique being he in fact is. In so doing he does not become 'selfish' in the ordinary sense of the word, but is merely fulfilling the peculiarity of his nature, and this... is vastly different from egotism or individualism.”*

Jung's idea of individuation is also very similar to the notion in humanistic psychology of “self-realization” or “self-actualization.” How different is the goal of individuation from that of initiation in occultism or the notion of finding the “True Self” and doing one's Will in Thelema? How different is the “process of psychological development that fulfills the individual qualities given” from the process of actualizing one's potential through self-discipline, psycho-physical exercises, and the cultivation of health and strength of mind and body? It would seem that the aims of Jungian psychotherapy and that of initiation are overwhelmingly similar, if not practically identical.

There are many other forms of psychotherapy, which all, in one way or another, parallel the aims of initiation for occultists. One form of psychotherapy is called Gestalt therapy. Gestalt therapy aims to expose the various layers of the patient – the games they play and various defense mechanisms they use to hide themselves from reality – so they can become aware of and face these anxieties. This is virtually identical with the idea of de-conditioning the nervous system of various habits and re-conditioning in accordance with Will, i.e. so that one's potential is actualized.

Another form of psychotherapy that has gained a large following recently is Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy or CBT. To give an oversimplified definition, CBT seeks to alter thoughts, feelings, and behavior through changing the ways people think about themselves, others, and the world (the "C" of CBT) as well as altering courses of behavior that fuel whatever issue is bothering the client (the "B" of CBT). This is, once again, a clear parallel to the idea of de-conditioning the organism, specifically from its cognitive and behavioral habits that perpetuate its suffering, and re-conditioning in accordance with the Will of the client, i.e. so that he or she can become a more healthy and productive person.

Yet another form of psychotherapy is Existential-Humanistic Therapy. Two leaders in this field define this form of psychotherapy very succinctly, saying that "existential humanism can be understood as a process of becoming and knowing oneself." Others have said that Existential-Humanism is "an orientation with a model of human psychological health based on the fullest realization and actualization of self." It should be clear that Existential-Humanism seeks to "initiate" the client into a fuller way of being, becoming a more complete expression of the self, much in the same way that occultists seek "spiritual progress" in the quest to Know Thyself.

As we can see, it is actually quite eerie how close some aspects of psychotherapy come to the ideas from occultism. In fact, Crowley thanks Freud and Jung in particular for elucidating ideas that were known by magicians for centuries (namely, that of the power and importance of those aspects of oneself that are not conscious), as well as likening the process of coming to know the True Self to the process of psychoanalysis. It is clear that occultists, at least Crowley and Israel Regardie (who was a

psychotherapist himself), saw the overlap between the aims and methods of psychotherapy and occultism.

Transpersonal psychology, Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy, Gestalt, Existential-Humanistic, Cognitive-Behavioral, and many more forms of psychotherapy all have interesting parallels with various parts of the theory and practice of occultism, but an entire book would be required to examine all the comparisons and contrasts.

In short, the aims of initiation are mirrored in different aspects by the various forms of psychotherapy. Israel Regardie insisted, “Since the goal of both magic and psychotherapy is the well-being of the individual, it is only natural they become re-acquainted with one another.” This is one reason why Israel Regardie was so insistent that all occultists should receive psychotherapy concurrent with or even previous to their spiritual practice. Though the methods and underlying theories of psycho-spiritual change may differ, both initiation and psychotherapy have the aim of making the unconscious conscious, actualizing the potential of the individual, of de-conditioning various mental and behavioral habits, and realigning the self to be in further harmony with the entire psyche or organism.

# Chapter 15 – Astral Phenomena: The Neurology of the Astral Body, the Astral Plane and Astral Projection

Much of occult writings have to do with the astral body, “which is called by various authors the Astral double, body of Light, body of fire, body of desire, fine body, scin-laeca and numberless other names.” Again, Naturalistic Occultism adopts the motto of Scientific Illuminism, “The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion,” therefore we must certainly adapt to modern methods and understandings of science in order to understand the astral body.

The astral body, or body of light, may now be understood in physiological terms, largely because of recent developments in the understanding of the human nervous system. It is known that there exists a representation of the body created by the brain, which is called the “body image.” This is, very simply, the sense that one has of one's body in space. The generation of this “image” comes from the brain, which integrates information from the body. If parts of the brain responsible for generating the body image are damaged, various deficits and distortions of one's body image result. Recent research has implicated the parietal cortex – a part of the brain largely responsible for spatial orientation – as the area of the brain largely responsible for generating one's own view of one's body. Many experiments in neuroscience revolve around the fact that the body image is highly malleable and changeable. The first hypothesis we put forward is that the astral body is actually the brain's self-representation of the body. This “astral body” is actually the “body image,” and the same neural functions used to generate one are used for the other.

Further, much research has been done on out-of-body experiences by Olaf Blanke and Henrik Ehrsson, among others. The assumption that the self is the body by most people is challenged by the fact that people experience themselves in “extrapersonal space,” i.e. the space outside of one's body. The fact is that one's “visuo-spatial perspective” – one's visual perspective in space – is not necessarily con-fined to being within one's physical body.

Blanke writes, “[Out-of-body experiences] are culturally invariant brain phenomena that can be investigated using neuroscience.” That is, out-of-body experiences occur across different cultures, they are the result of brain functioning, and they can be studied through the knowledge and methods of neuroscience. Biologically, out-of-body experiences are dependent on “an interaction between lower-level vestibular [i.e. sense of balance and spatial orientation] and multisensory processing and higher-level self-processing such as egocentric visuo-spatial perspective taking, agency, and self-location.” This brings us to our second hypothesis: The astral plane, with all of its “astral phenomena” is actually the self-generated “extrapersonal space” experienced in out-of-body experiences as well as in dreams.

Crowley writes concerning the “astral body,” “Now this interior body of the Magician... does exist, and can exert certain powers which his natural body cannot do. It can, for example, pass through 'matter,' and it can move freely in every direction through space. But this is because 'matter,' in the sense in which we commonly use the word, is on another plane.” The difference is most likely that physical “matter” consists of external or environmental stimuli interpreted by the senses and the brain, while “astral phenomena” (including “astral matter”) in the “astral plane” - or “extrapersonal space” - are internal stimuli (from the brain and the rest of the body) being generated and interpreted by the brain. Therefore, as our third hypothesis, “matter” (physical plane) is sensory stimuli from the environment interpreted by the brain, and the various objects, forces, entities, and environments “objects” and “phantoms” of “extrapersonal space” (astral plane) are internally generated stimuli interpreted by the brain.

As for the method of “astral projection” or volitional out-of-body experiences, a later chapter (see chapter 20) details the basic practice. It is thought that changes in visual attention can potentially create out-of-body experiences. That is, focusing on certain aspects of visual experience can generate out-of-body experiences. In addition to this, we know that imagined visual stimuli are treated as similar to actual stimuli by the brain. That is, the same parts of the brain will fire when imagining an apple, for example, as when one actually sees a physical apple. Therefore, as our fourth hypothesis, it may be possible for enough volitional attention to be directed towards imagining certain visual stimuli to potentially induce an

out-of-body experience. It is of note that the method of volitional out-of-body experiences, or “projection,” used by Aleister Crowley involves, “transfer[ring] the seat of his consciousness to [an] imagined figure; so that it may seem to him that he is seeing with its eyes, and hearing with its ears.” This method may potentially work because you are supplying yourself with imaginary visual, tactile, and auditory signals – specifically the experience of seeing yourself from an extrapersonal perspective – which are treated as real afferent (sensory) signals by the brain. This conflicting information supplied by the body's own imagination would essentially mimic the effects of supplying the brain with actual manipulated visual signals, e.g., wearing a video headset that is linked to a camera that is pointed at your body, essentially making you view your body from outside of itself. In fact, this very process generated out-of-body experiences for Blanke and Ehrrson.

To summarize, the astral body is actually the brain's self-representation of the body, or the “body image.” The astral plane, with all of its “astral phenomena” is actually the “extra personal space” experienced in out-of-body experiences. “Matter” (physical plane) is sensory stimuli from the environment interpreted by the brain, and the various “objects” and “phantoms” or “extrapersonal space” (astral plane) are internally generated stimuli interpreted by the brain. Astral projection is possible because changes in visual attention can potentially create out-of-body experiences and imagined visual stimuli are treated similarly to actual stimuli by the brain. Astral projection may therefore be understood naturalistically as volitional attention being directed towards imagining certain visual stimuli or perspectives to induce an out-of-body experience.

Most methods of projecting the astral body or “body image” consist of the dual mechanisms of (1) physical relaxation and (2) mental concentration on an imagined extrapersonal visuo-spatial perspective (a fancy way to say “a point-of-view outside of yourself”). Now – with the advent of many modern scientific tools like MRIs, EEGs, and PETs and with the blossoming of the field of neuroscience – we may better understand the natural processes behind the phenomenon of “astral projection,” or volitional out-of-body experiences.

Physical relaxation essentially correlates with reducing the amount of external stimuli received by the body as well as internally produced stimuli such as muscle tension. Relaxation allows for the brain to trick itself into thinking one's perspective is outside of one's own body – an out-of-body experience or “astral projection” – by reducing external or environmental stimuli.

When the body is in a relaxed state, the method of astral projection then relies on imagining oneself in a visuo-spatial perspective outside of one's own body. To repeat: changes in visual attention can potentially create out-of-body experiences, imagined visual stimuli are treated as similar to actual stimuli by the brain, and therefore it may be possible for enough volitional attention to be directed towards imagining certain visual stimuli to potentially induce an out-of-body experience.

This imagination or visualization is not necessarily visual. For example, Robert Bruce's “rope technique” utilizes only imaginary tactile sensations of feeling a rope to the exclusion of imaginary visual stimuli. As a side note, it might be that visual imagination demands more “mental energy” than tactile imaginations: a hypothesis that may potentially be empirically tested. Therefore, it is possible that other sensory stimuli or combinations thereof could be utilized to generate out-of-body experiences. The vast majority of research (so far) is based in the visual modality, so I have mostly limited my discussion thereto.

Often, various feelings, sights, and noises are experienced while beginning to attempt to imagine a perspective outside of one's own body but not yet being entirely “successful.” People often describe these sensations in terms of “vibrations,” “light,” “subtle energies,” and other ambiguous terms. Vestibular sensations (feelings of the body in space and one's own balance) accompanied Olaf Blanke's studies of out-of-body experiences. The onset of vestibular and somatosensory illusions are most likely a sign of the beginning of a successful “astral projection”; that is, they indicate the onset of a successful conscious “separation” of the body image or “astral body” from the physical body.

Let us at the outset discard the various notions that these perceptions of “vibrations,” “light,” and bodily distortions at the onset of volitional

projections are some kind of divine energy, magical force, or “astral current.” Not only are these assertions unscientific, but they add no clarity to our understanding by instead relegating the causal mechanism that gives rise to these initial illusions to some abstract and ill-defined concept. They replace mystery with mystery, and it has been wisely stated that “mystery is the enemy of Truth.” These sensations of vibration, light, and bodily distortions are rooted in the physiology of the human nervous system, specifically its integration of visual, tactile, auditory, and vestibular information in the parietal cortex (and especially the temporo-parietal junction, as implicated in studies by Blanke et al.).

Though these vestibular and somatosensory illusions may be signs of success, many counsel to ignore these sensations because they may ruin chances for a “successful” astral projection or a “complete separation” (i.e. of the “astral body” from the physical body). This is most likely because the initial appearance of vestibular illusions pertains merely to the onset of a volitional projection. Further concentration on an imagined extrapersonal perspective is needed for a complete “split” between one's awareness within one's physical body and the body image or “astral body.”

Even after a powerful astral experience he dubbed the “Star-Sponge Vision,” Crowley explained, “I want you to note in the particular the astonishing final identification of this cosmic experience with the nervous system as described by the anatomist.” This identification of the experience with the nervous system is corroborated in his essay “Ethyl Oxide” where he remarks, “Having perceived 'the Universe as Nothingness with twinkles' etc... [it was] subsequently understood that this form is determined by the structure of the nervous system and thus really a phantasm of it.” It is possible to have fantastic, powerful visions while still recognizing that they are products of “phantasms” of the nervous system. In our view, rather than this “explaining away” magick, it shows the mysterious and magical nature of our psycho-physical constitution.

To summarize, the essential method to achieve volitional out-of-body experiences is physical relaxation and mental concentration on an imagined extrapersonal visuo-spatial perspective. Physical relaxation correlates with reducing the amount of external stimuli received by the body as well as

internal stimuli such as muscle tension (and vestibular sensations). Because changes in visual attention could potentially create out-of-body experiences and imagined visual stimuli are treated as similar to actual stimuli by the brain, it is possible for enough volitional attention to be directed towards imagining certain visual or tactile stimuli to potentially induce an out-of-body experience or "astral projection." The onset of vestibular and somatosensory illusions are most likely a sign of the beginning of a successful "astral projection." These sensations – which can include that of vibration, light and bodily distortions – are rooted in the physiology of the human nervous system, specifically its integration of visual, tactile, auditory, and vestibular information in the parietal cortex, especially the temporo-parietal junction.

This "astral plane" exists in the sense that everyone acknowledges they function on a different "plane" than physical reality when having dreams. We can all recognize that we have various thoughts and feelings ind reams while simultaneously acknowledging that they have no objective existence "outside of our heads." We all interact with and are affected by "astral phenomena" (the sights, sounds, and feelings of that "plane") every night. We can, for example, wake up screaming in fear, showing us that the "astral phenomena" are subjectively real in that they affect us similarly to physical phenomena while not necessarily ascribing external or objective existence to them.

We can understand this "astral plane," in the end, as nothing supernatural but rather as the result of the mysterious and wonderful workings of Nature. Either way, it is an interesting avenue of human consciousness that we can explore. There is something interesting to the debate about whether there really is an "astral" plane with astral currents, energies, etc. but in the end, if you can gain insight, knowledge, and strength through "astral projections," that is justification enough for giving attention to this facet of human consciousness. In line with our inclinations towards pragmatism, we say that results are results and "success is your proof."

# Chapter 16 – Astral Workings & Scrying: The Interpretation of Ambiguous Stimuli

Astral projection and scrying are two forms of the intentional production – or “making-conscious” – of unconscious imagery. In the previous chapter we examined a neurological explanation for “astral phenomena” and out-of-body experiences in general. Now let's take a step back...

All stimuli are ambiguous in the sense that, taken out of context, they can be interpreted in many ways. For example, hearing someone yell “Stella!” might mean someone is ordering a beer, someone is watching “Streetcar Named Desire,” or someone is crazily shouting in the streets. It all depends on context to determine the meaning of the initial ambiguous stimulus. As another example: If you saw a picture of a child sitting on the steps outside of a house, there are many ways to interpret this image. Was he playing with his friends but left out? Did his parents send him outside? Is he a contemplative child? Did he hurt his knee while playing by the river and come back to be comforted by his mother? Is the child's body really a shell for an alien pod coming to get you? It should be fairly obvious that the original stimulus is ambiguous and requires context and interpretation to make it meaningful.

The reason things aren't always extremely ambiguous is that we understand them through their immediate and historical context. A person in underpants playing the guitar in the streets might seem insane, but if you realize that he is a cultural phenomenon in New York known as the Naked Cowboy (who most likely gets a lot of money from his act), then it would seem clever. The context guides the interpretation of ambiguous stimuli.

Psychology seeks to manipulate this facet of human nature through what are called “projective tests.” In these tests, you project your interpretation onto an ambiguous image. These tests discover a person's characteristic desires, behaviors, and personality structure by subjecting them to an ambiguous stimulus and observing how that person responds (or “projects” onto the image, hence the term “projective test”). The client imposes their own

perceptual and personality structure onto the stimulus and therefore reveals his or her own desires, internal conflicts, and issues through this projection. That is, it is a form of "As within, so without" (see chapter 8) that is done intentionally: we gain insight about the "within" by how they view the "without."

The most famous example of a projective test is the Rorschach inkblot test, developed by Hermann Rorschach in the early 1920s. Clients were asked what they saw in a series of images and their responses would then be recorded and coded. Another example of projective testing is the TAT or Thematic Apperception Test that was introduced in 1935. Various pictures are shown to the client (like the image of the boy sitting on the steps in front of a house mentioned earlier) and they are asked to tell a story about the image. The client would then create a story, giving meaning to the ambiguous image, and thereby gives insight into the desires, conflicts, and needs of that client.

These projective tests can be understood as analogous to the methods of astral projection and scrying. Both psychological projective tests and astral projection/scrying expose people to stimuli that require interpretation, and both processes aim to bestow insight upon the individual in using these methods. That being said, there are many differences between the psychological and occult approaches. Firstly, the stimuli (normally images) are pre-arranged in psychology while they are self-generated from the unconscious through the aforementioned practices of astral projection and scrying in occultism. Secondly, psychology uses trained professionals who implement systematic methods when using projective tests. The psychologist uses tested methods for understanding the client's interpretations and attempts to remain objective in their assessment. In occultism, you only have yourself. There is an advantage of an objective, trained individual monitoring your interpretations and seeing the patterns that are arising. For example, the occultist might interpret the image of a boy on some steps as the boy being sent out by his parents without realizing that this could indicate a projection of issues with their own parents... something a trained psychologist would be objective enough to notice. The occultist must maintain sufficient objectivity and vigilance to realize these connections of their visions to their real lives. Thirdly, the occultist must

deal with her own “shadow side” whereas a client being psychologically assessed would have a trained professional to help deal with the darker aspects of the psyche. As William Blake said, “The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man”; therefore it takes a very strong, courageous, and objective aspirant to be able to handle the “averse” or “sinister” aspects of her own psyche without any external aids.

The fact that we each interpret ambiguous stimuli differently leads to the notion of skepticism of visions (visions being here defined as a conscious experience of “astral phenomena” not necessarily limited to only the visual sensory modality). How do we know that there is any worth or truth in any kind of interpretation of a vision? Crowley wrote, “the student [should] contradict every vision and refuse to enjoy it... because there is certainly another vision possible of a precisely contradictory nature.” Here Crowley announces a sort of Newtonian law of visions: for every vision, there is a possible equal and opposite vision. Of all the images seen and truths heard, the exact contradictories are also possible. Why is this so? One way to explain this is to look at the nature of the human psyche itself. The psychologist Carl Jung wrote that the psyche taken as a whole is a “coincidentia oppositorum” or “complexio oppositorum,” a coincidence or conjunction of opposites. For every dark place in the psyche there is a light place; for every masculine facet in the psyche there is a feminine facet. This is why the visions can sometimes contradict each other. We should beware of jumping to conclusions from any visions regarding the truth of things seen or heard because the exact contradiction could potentially be seen or heard in another vision.

Essentially, we can see astral visions and scrying in the same light as psychological projective tests: they both allow for the individual to project meaning onto ambiguous stimuli, thereby giving insight into that person. The main difference is that the ambiguous stimuli involved are arising out of the unconscious in the case of “astral visions” and scrying while, in psychological projective tests, the stimuli are externally imposed and prearranged. Although we must remain skeptical of the truth-value of any one vision, accepting its subjective value and being wary (once more!) of assuming its objective value, we should plunge into the depths of the

psyche and explore our own nature in order to know ourselves better. As it has been said, “Go thou unto the outermost places and subdue all things,” and, “But exceed! exceed! Strive ever to more...”

# Chapter 17 – Invocation: The Willed Activation of Latent Parts of the Psyche

We have already seen how magick can be understood as the intentional de-conditioning and reconditioning of the human nervous system. One specific area in which this idea is applicable is the realm of "invocation." An invocation is the ritualized calling of some entity, energy, or idea into oneself. Aleister Crowley defined invocation as "Uniting Himself to a particular Deity by devotion"113 and, in reference to the sign of success, he wrote, "The conscious ego of the Magician is to be destroyed and to be absorbed in that of the God whom he invokes." It is the intentional awakening of a facet of yourself, from the qualities of a god like Osiris to simple emotions like anger.

"Gods," "deities," "angels," "demons," "images," and whatever else is used in invocation are understood in Naturalistic Occultism to represent symbolized aspects of one's psyche. For example, Osiris might represent a collection of the ideas of death and rebirth, self-sacrifice, and redemption; Zeus might represent the ideas of paternity, immensity, power, governing, and generative power; Kali might represent the "darker" aspects of life, death, dissolution of the ego, and cruelty; Mercury might represent the ideas of quickness, cunning, trickiness, ingenuity, adaptability, and fickleness. In this sense, each pantheon represent a different symbolic understanding of the human psyche1 (Crowley once wrote, "The spirits of the Goetia are portions of the human brain"). In adopting a certain pantheon, we are adopting a certain symbolic relation with our unconscious.

In one sense, people are using this idea of invocation when they think, for example, they would like to be energized and uplifted so they listed to loud rock music. It is the intentional awakening or "invoking" of a facet of yourself – being energized and uplifted in this example – through the method of music, which makes this a form of invocation. This same view was taken by Dion Fortune, "We do not affect fate by our magical operations, we affect ourselves; we re-enforce those aspects of our nature

which are in sympathy with the powers we invoke." There are many, many ways of utilizing this idea. As Crowley explains:

*"There are a thousand different ways of compassing the end proposed, so far as external things are concerned. The whole secret may be summarised in these four words: 'Enflame thyself in praying.' The mind must be exalted until it loses consciousness of self. The Magician must be carried forward blindly by a force which, though in him and of him, is by no means that which he in his normal state of consciousness calls I. Just as the poet, the lover, the artist, is carried out of himself in a creative frenzy, so must it be for the Magician."*

This can be done by identifying yourself with the qualities of the deity or idea that you are invoking in your mind's eye, chanting a mantra, singing, dancing, reading related poetry, performing dramatic enactments, et cetera ad infinitum. The list is endless and limited only to your ingenuity and style.

This is where the (objectively arbitrary yet subjectively useful) system of correspondences becomes useful. If you introspect and feel you lack in, for example, "martial" qualities like aggressiveness, activity, virility, and destruction, then you would invoke "Mars." This can be done systematically by using a system of correspondences like those found in Aleister Crowley's 777 and Other Qabalistic Writings and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn's documents. You can take the various correspondences of Mars and create various symbols, wear various clothes, carry certain implements (touch), have certain adornments around the room (sight), light various incenses (smell), play certain music, say certain prayers, sing certain songs (sound), consume certain foods (taste), feel the implements one has gathered, perform various physical gestures (touch), and contemplate certain thoughts (mind). As Crowley says, "Our Ceremonial Magic fines down, then, to a series of minute, though of course empirical, physiological experiments."

This is then a simple way to understand invocation. First, various correspondences and relations are established between various sensory objects (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) and various mental ideas (such as the "god-form" of Harpocrates) and various emotions (such as quiescence,

purity, stillness, and silence). Then, these correspondences are deliberately manipulated to attune your awareness to a certain idea or feeling. When the ideas and feelings are aroused, the magician identifies herself with these and "becomes" what she is invoking. Psychologically, it could be said you are releasing or accessing a certain unconscious potency. There is no need to believe in deities, astral or spiritual entities, spiritual forces, or anything superstitious like that. All that is needed to understand invocation is the human psyche (and all the more reason to marvel and wonder at it!).

# Chapter 18 – On the Mystic Attainment

A two-fold definition of initiation was brought up in the chapter on psychotherapy (see chapter 14). The first part of that definition refers to what we might call the "mystic attainment." We repeat this part of the definition:

*"Initiation is primarily the attainment of a certain state of consciousness, known as enlightenment, 'the consciousness of the con-tinuity of existence,' the union of subject and object, the union of microcosm and macrocosm, the obtaining of the Stone of the Philosophers, the uniting of the soul with God, union with God, Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, the return to Kether, 'the dissolution of the Self in the Infinite,' 'the process by which a man comes to learn that unknown Crown,' etc. There are many metaphors and terms used for this phenomenon, but we may call it the perception in a person's consciousness where all things in the universe are considered as a unitary, continuous phenomenon (the terms 'unity' and 'non-duality' both express this in positive and negative senses, respectively)."*

As a process, this has been called satori, union of opposites, unity with God, samadhi, Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, becoming the Way, nirvana, liberation, moksha, kensho, enlightenment, the Great Work, the Quest for the Holy Grail, henosis, and many other terms. As an object, it is the Stone of the Wise, the Stone of the Philosophers, the Divine Nectar/Amrita, the "hidden wealth of secret places," Godhead, the Heavenly Dew, Augoeides, the Oversoul, Abraxas, the Diamond in the Lotus, Brahman, Jechidah, the Gold at the center of the Dross, the Higher Self, Inner Self, True Self, "the Kingdom of Heaven," Daemon, Genius, the Elixir of Immortality/Life, "the Alpha and the Omega," the Budda-dhatu/Buddha-essence, the Universal Soul, and nearly an infinite amount of other terms.

Naturalistic Occultism regards this mystic attainment as a psychological phenomenon – a manifestation of the human psyche's inherent potential. "Initiation means the Journey Inwards"; that is, it is not something

supernatural, divine, or extra-dimensional given to you. In initiation, "nothing is changed or can be changed; but all is trulier understood with every step"; that is, it is not some actual physical object to be obtained (e.g. an actual Grail, Dew, or piece of gold) or entity to be met (e.g. an actual Angel, God, or spirit). Rather, it is a natural state of the human mind. We agree with Crowley when he says, "There is a physiological (or pathological; never mind now!) state which I call Samadhi; and that state is as real – in relation to man – as sleep, or intoxication, or death... All these are states of the consciousness of man." Crowley says that this mystic attainment, called "Samadhi" in this quotation, is a state of consciousness just like sleep or intoxication. It is his naturalistic approach which Crowley emphasizes over and over again in his various writings and in the motto of his journal The Equinox, "The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion," and it is particularly relevant and illuminating in our modern age.

Crowley writes elsewhere about this same mystic attainment (called "Genius" in this quotation):

*"We asset a secret source of energy which explains the phenomenon of Genius... We do not believe in any supernatural explanations, but insist that this source may be reached by the following out of definite rules, the degree of success depending on the capacity of the seeker, and not upon the favour of any Divine Being. We assert that the critical phenomenon which determines success is an occurrence in the brain characterized essentially by the uniting of subject and object. We propose to discuss this phenomenon, analyse its nature, determine accurately the physical, mental and moral conditions which are favourable to it, to ascertain its cause, and thus to produce it in ourselves, so that we may adequately study its effects."*

This quotation deserves careful attention. Firstly, the mystic attainment is here described as being "characterized essentially by the uniting of subject and object." Using plain terms of perception (subject and object), Crowley describes this state of mind: phenomenology. He explicitly says that this perception may be attained through effort according to certain rules and not through divine favors: pragmatism. He does "not believe in any any supernatural explanations," and he believes the experience of union is "an occurrence in the brain": naturalism. Finally, Crowley says the phenomenon

must be discussed and analyzed along with the specific conditions which produce it – a very scientific approach, indeed. This is one of the main rationales behind writing and sharing our Magical Records. There is no faith in one particular method here – there is definitely not an attitude of "I alone have the way to Truth!" - beyond the method of experimentation. All of this is entirely resonant with the aims and methods of Naturalistic Occultism.

Now that we have described the many symbols and metaphors of this mystic attainment ("mystic attainment" being one of them) and reaffirmed the natural (i.e. not supernatural) basis of it, we may look at the characteristics of this phenomenon to understand it more clearly. Crowley has already described one characteristic of this state: "the uniting of subject and object." This means that the subject or "I" of perception unites with the object of perception, that which is perceived. There is no distinction made between them. This is the primary characteristic of the mystic attainment, but let's look at some other aspects.

William James, the philosopher and psychologist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, wrote about the characteristics of mysticism in his book The Varieties of Religious Experience. In it, he delineated four characteristics of what may be called a "mystical experience": (1) ineffability, (2) noetic quality, (3) transiency, and (4) passivity.

(1) Ineffability means that the experience defies explanation or expression. On this Crowley wrote, "Since truth is supra-rational, it is incommunicable in the language of reason. Hence all mystics have written nonsense, and what they have written is so far untrue." If one tried to do such, it might look like this, "How infinite is the distance from This to That! Yet All is Here and Now. Nor is there any There or Then; for all that is, what is it but a manifestation, that is, a part, that is, a falsehood, of THAT which is not? Yet THAT which is not neither is nor is not That which is!" This ties in with Rudolf Otto's idea of the "numinous" or divine being a "mysterium."

He wrote, "'Holiness' – 'the holy' – is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion... which remains inexpressible... in the sense that it completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts."

(2) Moving on to James' next characteristic of the mystic experience, having a noetic quality means that a deep conviction or knowledge is felt: the analogous terms are gnosis, illumination, or revelation. That is, we know – not intellectually, but experientially – the truth of the experience. Whether this is absolutely true or not is not the question: it is asserting that there is an unshakeable sense of truth or insight that is felt in a mystical experience.

(3) Transiency simply means that the mystic state does not last forever. You "come down" from the experience. This (paradoxically in a way) can coexist with the subjective experience of timelessness or eternity. There is something that leads up to the mystical experience, there is the mystical experience itself, and then there is whatever comes after the experience. While we my feel a sense of timelessness (or space-lessness) during the mystical experience, the experience itself has a duration.

(4) Lastly, passivity means that one's "self" feels completely passive, a vehicle for a superior power, energy, or being (depending on the metaphor or symbol-set at work). Crowley talks about this in many places but it is exemplified by a line from The Book of Lies where he writes, "I am not I; I am but an hollow tube to bring down Fire from Heaven." He is merely a "hollow tube," an extremely passive symbol, to a force perceived as superior to the ego, which Crowley calls the "Fire from Heaven" in this line. It is probably no mistake that "Thelema" - the name of the system founded by Crowley – is the Greek word used in the Lord's prayer when "Thy Will be done," or the Divine Will, is written in the Bible. This ties into Rudolf Otto's idea of the numinous experience again. Although he focuses on the feeling of awe felt while in this state of passivity, he writes, "there is yet a further element which must be added, that, namely, of 'might,' 'power,' absolute overpoweringness'... there is the feeling of one's own submergence, of being but 'dust and ashes' and nothingness. And this forms the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility." This feeling of being "submerged" in a greater force – whether one calls it God, Brahman, Energy, Genius, Spirit, Self, Kundalini, Fire, L.V.X., etc. - is characteristic of what is meant by the passivity of mystical experiences.

William James goes on to say that a mystic state is the “overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute” and “in mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness.” This again reiterates the fundamental quality of the mystic attainment: unity (or non-duality) of consciousness. This is what has been called “the flavor of nonseparateness” and “the expansion of consciousness and the feeling of unity of the experient's heart-and-mind with the hidden (or concealed) ontological ground of all existence or with the original principle of all things and beings.” One might call it “un-differentiated consciousness” because one maintains an awareness, not of things as separated (differentiated) but of things as connected and united (un-differentiated). The language of Thelema in its central book Liber AL vel Legis (or The Book of the Law) speaks to this: “Bind nothing! Let there be no difference made among you between any one thing & any other thing; for thereby there cometh hurt.” Making a difference “between any one thing & any other thing” means one is differentiating and therefore still in “dualistic” consciousness. Therefore we should “Bind nothing!” and perceive all things as One. Its then said, “let it be ever thus; that men speak not of Thee as One but as None; and let them speak not of thee at all, since thou art continuous!” Then one becomes “chief of all,” having become identified with All Things. The world is understood as continuous, as “one thing,” yet this word “one” is even a misnomer (hearkening back to the idea of the mystic attainment as ineffable) so the word “None” is used. This attainment is promised to bring “certainty, not faith.” The mystic attainment is a direct experience that brings conviction (i.e. it has a noetic quality, as mentioned before), not some article of faith that is either believed in or not.

We now have a general conception of the mystic attainment. It is fundamentally characterized by a natural occurrence in consciousness where subject unites with object, a unity of perception. It is an unspeakable, inexpressible experience (ineffable), it gives gnosis or illumination (noetic), it lasts only for a period of time (transient), and one feels oneself as encompassed or assimilated by some greater force (passivity). This attainment is open to anyone of any location or belief system – as Crowley said, it “may be reached by the following out of definite rules, the degree of success depending on the capacity of the seeker.” It is, again, a natural occurrence. No matter what one calls this “mystic attainment,” it is an

inherent part of the human psyche and it is essential to occultism. As the poet William Blake said, “if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.”

This state of consciousness may be attained through many, many different methods, from meditation to dance to drugs to prayer to visualization. It is the work of each person to explore and experiment, finding which methods work effectively for themselves. Crowley emphasizes the importance of the mystic attainment in terms of initiation: “[It] is the essential work of every man; none other ranks with it either for personal progress or for power to help one's fellows. This unachieved, man is no more than the unhappiest and blindest of animals. He is conscious of his own incomprehensible calamity, and clumsily incapable of repairing it. Achieved, he is no less than the co-heir of gods, a Lord of Light. He is conscious of his own consecrated course, and confidently ready to run it.” Then one can proudly proclaim, “Thou art That, and That am I.”

# Chapter 19 – The Practice of Naturalistic Occultism

This book is written primarily for practitioners – for occultists and magicians. Though much of the material is naturally theoretical in nature, it is meant to orient practitioners to a new approach to their practice. This involves the pragmatic approach to the practices themselves, a phenomenological approach to recording and communicating results, and a naturalistic understanding or explanation of the methods and results (see chapter 7 for a full explanation of this process).

I want to emphasize that Scientific Illuminism – or Naturalistic Occultism – is an approach to occultism. It is one of many ways to orient oneself in understanding occult phenomena and practices. I do not believe that it is inherently better in any kind of absolute sense than any other approach because "better" or "worse" depends on the values that you hold as an occultist. Naturalistic Occultists will most likely have values that favor the integration of modern science and religion (or occultism), the challenging of superstition and dogma, progress, being goal-oriented, being methodical and systematic, being as efficient and effective as possible, and being skeptical yet pragmatic. Anyone who holds these values as part of their approach to occultism should very naturally appreciate this particular system.

We have compared this approach to other forms of occultism (see chapter 2) and I want to repeat what was said in this earlier section: I believe we should view anyone that is part of these other traditions (or similar ones) as brethren, fellow travelers and fellow students of the Mysteries. We should be realistic in that we are aware of their shortcomings and appreciative of their contributions. Scientific Illuminists should work in the spirit of collaboration and progress, not one-upmanship and competition.

It may suit a person of a certain type who holds certain values to practice occultism in a way that disregards everything in this book. I believe that if it works for them, success is their proof. If someone does not see the value of

the Magical Record, then so be it. If someone does not see the value of understanding their practice naturalistically, then so be it. We may present the arguments in favor of doing things our way, but I fail to see the value in spending our time trying to "convert" people to this approach. Rather, we should respect the choices of each person; we should let them do their Wills and we can do ours.

This all being said, the main impetus for writing this book was a reaction to the superstition that plagues the field of occultism. As it has been said, "The more I see of the occult world, the more I deplore the general absence of an impartial and scientific attitude." I find it incredible how so many occultists will freely speak about the superstition and dogma of established, organized religions yet be totally blind to the same kind of superstition in their own beliefs and practices. People will discount the Judeo-Christian notion of God with contempt and then, in the same breath, talk about their Guardian Angel who performs all the same functions of the God they disavow. People will discount the Judeo-Christian approach to prayer and, in the same breath, talk about how they send astral healing energy to their sick friends. People will scoff at rosaries and yet buy magical crystals; people will scoff at the Holy Trinity and yet believe in the Qabalistic Tree of Life. The examples are endless. I am certain that anyone who has spent any time at all reading occult books and participated in the occult community will know what I am talking about.

It should be clear that Naturalistic Occultism is an attempt to step away from superstition without completely disregarding or "explaining away" occult practices. This book is full of examples of this: We can disregard the superstitious understandings of divination (chapter 10), gematria (chapter 11), initiation (chapter 14), astral phenomena (chapters 15 and 16), invocation (chapter 17), and mysticism (chapter 18) while retaining the practice as understood in a naturalistic light. Instead of further separating what has been called the "non-overlapping magisteria" of science and religion, we intend to unite them under the banner of Scientific Illuminism whose motto is "The Method of Science, The Aim of Religion." As it has been said, "Occult science, rightly understood, is the link between psychology and religion; it gives the means of a spiritual approach to science, and a scientific approach to the spiritual life." The contributions of

science to occultism have been acknowledged throughout this book and, with the adoption of Scientific Illuminism, we may begin to show what occultism has to contribute to science.

The approach of Naturalistic Occultism is accessible to both the religious and the secular, the theistic and the atheistic. It is strict in its philosophical foundations yet flexible enough to be accommodating to many belief systems. I believe that this is what is needed in order to form a new basis for the understanding and progress of occultism. What follows is a preliminary sketch of different ways to pragmatically approach occult practice. These are simply a few examples of formulating our practice in a way that is intended to be concise yet thorough and informative yet not superstitious. The practice of Naturalistic Occultism is only in its infancy and this book represents a first step in attempting to formulate this approach. The progress of our field requires the collaboration of occultists such as yourself. I encourage anyone who is interested in participating in this pursuit to join our community, the Society of Scientific Illuminism, and cooperate with one another as you will so that we may see the star of magick rise higher and become brighter.

# Chapter 20 – Astral Projection or Scrying

**Theory:**

1. Astral projection or scrying involves exploration of the unconscious - “astral phenomena” - by entering a “waking dream” state from a state of wakefulness.

2. The physical body must be relaxed yet alert.

a) This may be accomplished through the use of various “asanas” or postures, including simply sitting upright in a chair.

b) A balance should be struck between alertness (as in when one is standing up) and relaxation (as when one is lying down).

3. The mind must be both (i) consciously aware and (ii) primed by some kind of preceding ritual or prayer.

4. The body must be visualized as outside of one's own physical body.

**Practice:**

1. Begin by formulating the intention of the session, i.e. what energy, force, symbol, or entity is intended to be explored.

2. Let the practitioner – or some aid – invoke this energy through some kind of ritual or prayer.

a) For example, if wanting to explore the element of Fire, one might perform a Lesser Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram of Fire and then recite a prayer to the elementals of Fire.

b) There is no “true” or “perfect” way to do this: Whatever means achieves the result desired is considered “true” from a pragmatic point-of-view.

3. Then, visualize the body as separate from the physical body.

a) It appears to be useful to imagine this body rising upwards (called “rising on the planes”) until images appear.

4. Be aware of any sights, sounds, feelings, tastes, or smells that occur.

5. Now, “test” any entity that appears.

a) This may be done with a greeting, e.g. “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law” if you are a Thelemite, expecting the proper response, “Love is the law, love under will.”

b) This may also be done by asking the entity's name and/or number and then verifying whether it lines up Qabalistically with the force that was intended to be invoked.

6. Be wary of any thoughts and emotions that occur during the vision, especially insofar as they interfere with maintaining focus.

7. When the vision is complete, let the practitioner come back into their physical body.

8. Following the vision, record everything as thoroughly as possible, ideally in phenomenological language (i.e. describing everything as it was experienced), in the Magical Record.

9. Make a note of all information in the vision which symbolically correlates with the original intention of the session (as in step 1).

10. Let the practitioner consider ways in which the process may be made to be more effective, experimenting with different techniques in order to find what means is most suitable to the individual.

# Chapter 21 – Lucid Dreaming

**Theory:**

1. Lucid dreaming involves exploration of the unconscious - “astral phenomena” - by entering a “waking dream” state from a state of sleep.

2. The physical body must be relaxed to the point of being essentially in a state of sleep.

3. The mind must be primed through repetition, while in a waking state, of a certain cue. This creates a subconscious “prime” to alert the practitioner that she is in fact asleep.

a) This can be something as simple as constantly asking oneself “Am I dreaming?” throughout the day, periodically trying to fly, or trying to read a book or clock and then looking again to see if it says the same thing.

b) If this cue is repeated enough, it will repeat while in a dream state and alert the practitioner that he or she is dreaming.

4. If the cue occurs while in a dream state, the practitioner should be able to become aware and become conscious while dreaming.

**Practice:**

1. Begin by formulating a cue that will be used to alert oneself that one is dreaming.

2. Repeat this cue throughout the day, earnestly questioning whether one is awake or asleep.

a) If this is done half-heartedly without truly questioning if one is awake or asleep, chances are that the same attitude will reoccur while dreaming and the cue will be ineffective.

3. Be vigilant to notice things that may not be “right,” i.e. following the laws of the physical world.

a) This can include being in a place that is far away from where the practitioner physically is located (e.g. at one's old high school), people being around that are dead or far away, familiar places having slightly different structure or characteristics (e.g. a large grandfather clock appearing in your room when there is normally nothing there), or things shifting when looked at twice (e.g. the time reading differently on a clock when checked at different times or a book saying different things when read twice).

4. If the practitioner becomes aware that she is dreaming, let her remain calm.

a) It seems like the two quickest ways for a lucid dream to prematurely end is for the practitioner to become either overly excited or afraid upon realizing their success.

5. Let the practitioner remember their intention, visiting a predetermined area, speaking with a predetermined entity, or exploring a predetermined energy or symbol.

6. Be vigilant against the lucid dream prematurely terminating, whether through waking up or falling back into unconsciousness (i.e. a normal dream where one is not wakeful).

7. “Test” any entity that appears, making sure that they are in fact who you are looking for (e.g. if you are looking to speak to Horus and Hathor appears, you can presume that something is not right).

8. When the vision is complete, let the practitioner attempt to wake up and come back into their physical body.

9. Following the vision, record everything as thoroughly as possible, ideally in phenomenological language (i.e. describing everything as it was experienced), in the Magical Record. It is imperative that this is done right after the vision since dream content is quickly forgotten if not recorded.

10. Make a note of all information in the vision which symbolically correlates with the original intention of the session.

11. Let the practitioner consider ways in which the process may be made to be more effective, experimenting with different techniques in order to find what means is most suitable to the individual.

# Chapter 22 – Un-Differentiated Consciousness through Focused Attention

**Theory:**

1. Un-differentiated consciousness (called the "mystic attainment" in chapter 18) is a state of consciousness wherein there is no differentiation between the subject and object of perception. Awareness is perceived as a unity, being non-dual or un-differentiated since it appears to defy the normal dualistic distinctions of waking consciousness.

2. The physical body must be relaxed yet alert.

a) This may be accomplished through the use of various "asanas" or postures, including simply sitting upright in a chair.

b) A balance should be struck between alertness (as in when one is standing up) and relaxation (as when one is lying down).

3. The mind must be focused upon a singular object of attention.

a) This can be a visual sight, e.g. a yellow square or a the Eye in the Triangle, or it can be a phrase (e.g. a mantra), or anything else with the sole condition being that it is a single object of attention.

4. Concentration is a skill and, like a muscle, becomes stronger and more effective with consistent practice.

5. All deviations from focus on this object are considered "breaks." These are indications of failing to maintain attention on the object.

6. These breaks may be classified as either (i) physical or (ii) mental. Physical breaks include (ia) sensory intrusions from the environment (e.g. someone yelling) and (ib) the body (e.g. the back aching). Mental breaks include thinking about something other than the object such as (iia) remembering events from the day or planning for the future, (iib) reverie or

daydreaming, (iic) thoughts about the process itself (e.g. “I am concentrating so well!” or “Maybe I should try something else?”), (iid) thoughts that appear random (e.g. “And if you're passing, won't you?”), and (iie) forgetting all things including the object of attention.

7. Progress may be classified in three stages: (i) awareness of only oneself and the object of attention, (ii) awareness of only the object of attention, (iii) awareness of neither subject nor object. These correspond loosely to the three stages of samyama (concentration) in raja yoga: dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.

8. The result, losing awareness of both subject and object (or “samadhi”) may be considered as a type of break itself since one is no longer aware of the object. This is not a “forgetting” of the object but rather a result of concentration being prolonged, focused, and intense.

**Practice:**

1. Begin by choosing an object of attention.

a) Common choices include a mantra (e.g. “Om Mani Padme Hum” or a visual object (e.g. the Lingam-Yoni or the figure of a circle) or a word (e.g. “Aum” or “Adonai”).

2. Sit in the chosen posture and get comfortable so that bodily signals are reduced to a minimum.

a) If you choose a strange posture, aches and pains will interrupt your focus. Choosing a “holy” posture like the full lotus has nothing to do with your success – the sole conditions are that your body is relaxed and yet alert. Often the best position is simply sitting in a chair with your back upright, i.e. not leaning against the back of the chair.

3. Begin to focus upon the object of attention.

4. When the practitioner becomes aware of a break, let her note this and let it go. That is, do not become overly concerned or annoyed but simply

acknowledge that the break happened and return the focus to the object of attention.

5. When the session of concentration is complete, whether or not the full result has been attained, write down everything in the Magical Record, including the amount and type of breaks that occurred.

6. Let the practitioner persist in her practice, adapting to any failures and encouraged by any successes.

# Chapter 23 – An Inconclusive Conclusion

Now we finally come to a close, not as an ending but as a pause, pregnant with the possibilities of what is to come. There has been a lot of material covered in the previous chapters, yet I can't help but feel that they represent merely the nascent stages of the growth of Naturalistic Occultism. It is as if we have seen the glimmers of gold in the dust: who knows what we may find if we are to dig a little deeper? Who knows what may happen if we see this child to maturity? This is why this chapter is an inconclusive conclusion. It is tentative and provisional, like all scientific knowledge, waiting to be overturned or superseded by a greater understanding.

When looking at my own and others practices, I can't help but think: if a haphazard attempt at scrying (for example) can yield great wisdom and allow people to see their potential, what more could a systematic and thorough method of scrying reveal? What more could a whole community of people dedicated to exploring these possibilities produce? It should be obvious to anyone with even a modicum of experience in occultism that there is a vast reservoir of power and knowledge that remains untapped in every human being. What limits us is simply our own drive and ingenuity.

I believe that Naturalistic Occultists are in a privileged position in the field of occultism. We are at the “edge.” What I mean by this is that we walk our paths with science and religion both supporting us. We neither discard science for superstitious religion that is disparaging of science nor do we discard religion for a reductionistic, materialistic science that is disparaging of religion. We approach these religious, occult phenomena with a scientific eye, meaning a skeptical eye that sees things naturalistically. We do not uncritically accept the explanations of supernatural forces and entities, yet we do not neglect the power of the practices in themselves. We acknowledge the power of the human nervous system and psyche, and we acknowledge the power of religious experience. It is at this “razor's edge” that we, I believe, are at an advantage to investigate phenomena that are difficult to explain psychologically or physiologically. This is represented largely by the field of parapsychology, with its study of things like ESP

(extra-sensory perception), remote viewing, and telekinesis. These kinds of things defy our current understanding of the world in a fundamental way.

Obviously there are plenty of charlatans who pretend to move things with their minds but are performing sleight of hand. There are people who claim to be psychics but simply make a thousand predictions while focusing on their "hits" and ignoring their "misses." That being said, we cannot let a few quacks make us disregard the possibility of telekinesis or psychic predictions being possible. This is the true scientific attitude: we are skeptical but not close-minded. We work off of the evidence that we have, but we do not preclude the possibility of new data overturning our current hypotheses about things work. Scientists are human beings and can be dogmatic just as much as religious people, but the ideal is to be always open-minded, willing to test these possibilities without deciding beforehand that they are delusions of a disordered mind.

Naturalistic Occultists should ideally accept the possibility that things cannot be explained physiologically or psychologically, as they have been done throughout this book, but only after these things have been tested. For example, it is actually fairly easy to test whether someone has the ability to gain information outside of their senses through astral projection. Person A can sit in room 1, Person B can choose an object to place in room 2, and Person A can "project" into room 2 to report what they see. If they are accurate, we may very well have evidence of something that would be quite difficult to explain naturalistically (at least with our current knowledge). That is, our first instinct should be to consider the psychological or physiological underpinnings of occult phenomena but, if we can rule these out experimentally, we must remain open to the possibility of things that cannot be currently explained. We must utter those three most humble and most holy words, "I don't know."

Though we abide by "The Method of Science" as Scientific Illuminists, this does not automatically make us exempt from dogmatism. There is such a thing as "bad science." Scientists routinely try to fit their results into preconceived models, alter data to become significant, and there are even many examples of falsification of data. Part of avoiding bad science involves being aware of our various biases (such as confirmation bias) as

have been mentioned throughout this book. Another aspect involves remembering that all theories are tentative insofar as they may be found to be flawed or untrue based on future data. We need to be willing to admit that we are wrong, which is actually a lot to ask from some people. We do not become scientists by simply calling ourselves such: it requires thinking and acting like one.

A common issue with scientists (and atheists) is that they claim to be against dogma yet often maintain their own blind faith. It seems that, nowadays, it is just as common to find a rabid, militant atheist as a rabid, militant theist. There is a difference between saying that "I have no reason to believe God exists" and "There is no God and anyone who believes in him is delusional, childish, and a threat." There is a difference between saying "There is no current evidence to support the existence of ESP but I am willing to remain open to the possibility" and "ESP doesn't exist and anyone who believes in it is uneducated, unscientific, and immature." The ideal of Scientific Illuminism is skepticism, not close-mindedness. We should not assume that anything which does not fit into a neat psycho-physiological explanatory system is not real, nor should we automatically discount anyone who does not speak with psycho-physiological (or phenomenological) language. The truly childish attitude is to assume you are right and that anyone who disagrees must be delusional. We shut ourselves off from many potentially illuminating exchanges if we cannot consider the points of those with whom we disagree.

These are some warnings that I feel are necessary in beginning our journey to establish the approach of Naturalistic Occultism. They are not meant to discourage but to remind us of the necessity of vigilance and equanimity of the mind as well as perseverance of will. We should remember that, in the end, all of these endeavors are facets of the great pursuit to know ourselves and our world. It is this exciting and challenging undertaking that has been called the Great Work, and not without good reason. Success is our proof, and success comes through marrying our lofty idealism to a steady practicality. Without both we are either lost in the clouds or aimless. Together we may reassert the power of religious experience and occult phenomena in general. We may unite under the banner of Scientific Illuminism for the cause of knowing ourselves, actualizing our potential,

understanding our world, and going on our journeys through life with wisdom and with joy. As it is said:

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

Love is the law, love under will.

# Appendix I: Glossary

**Astral body: The brain's self-representation of the body, the "body image," functioning in the "astral plane" of extrapersonal space. See chapter 15.**

**Astral plane: The self-generated "extrapersonal space" experienced in dreams and out-of-body experiences. As "matter" (physical plane) is sensory stimuli from the environment interpreted by the brain, the various "astral phenomena" of extrapersonal space (astral plane) are internally generated stimuli interpreted by the brain. See chapter 15.**

**Astral projection: Volitional attention being directed towards imagining or visualizing certain sensory (especially visual) stimuli that creates a sense of being in an extrapersonal visuo-spatial perspective (i.e. a perspective outside of the physical body) that induces an out-of-body experience. See chapter 15.**

**As within, so without: The idea that the perceivable world, the macrocosm, is actually a reflection of the inner workings and organization of the nervous system, the microcosm. See chapter 8.**

**Barnum statement: An ambiguous, general statement that can and is taken to be personally meaningful. This is most commonly seen at work in occultism in horoscopes. Also known as the "Barnum effect" or "Forer effect." See chapter 10.**

**Confirmation bias: A cognitive tendency that we all have to fit facts to preconceived conclusions (or classification systems) while excluding or ignoring the facts that don't "fit." In this way, we organize information to confirm our pre-established beliefs. See chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13.**

Divination: The practice of using a set of ambiguous symbols – Tarot, I Ching, geomancy, etc. – in conjunction with the innate pattern-finding drive of the human psyche in order to mold or fit the ambiguous information to be applicable to one's current life situation. See chapter 10.

Gematria: The practice of adding up words, phrases, names, and “magical formulas” to find corresponding numerical values in order to derive subjective meaning, contemplate the connection between apparently disconnected ideas, and to help the practitioner see the importance and divinity of all names and numbers. See chapter 11.

Initiation: (1) Spiritual attainment, specifically the perception or consciousness of all things in the universe as a unitary, continuous phenomenon and one's identity therewith. See chapter 14 and chapter 18.

(2) Spiritual progress, in the general sense of the de-conditioning (i.e. overcoming mental and behavioral habits) and reconditioning of the human nervous system in accordance with the volition of the organism as well as, in the particular sense, the continual self-discipline and cultivation of health and strength in mind and body through various practices in order to actualize the individual's potential. See chapter 14.

Invocation: The intentional awakening or making-conscious of a facet of yourself. The gods, demons, angels, and other images are symbolized aspects of one's psyche. See chapter 17.

Magick: Any intentional act or series of acts that are done toward the end of exploring, classifying, and/or manipulation of the practitioner's psyche, which includes but is not limited to ceremonial ritual, yoga, prayer, and use of drugs. See chapter 4.

**Mystic attainment: A state of human consciousness characterized by the dissolution of the opposition between subject & object or ego & non-ego, understood positively as a unity and negatively as non-duality. See chapter 18.**

Naturalism: The explanation of phenomena in terms of natural laws and forces, especially psychology and physiology, while avoiding any supernatural accounts. See chapter 1.

**Naturalistic Occultism: The approach to occultism that attempts to understand occult phenomena without positing anything supernatural (or even found outside of normal social and natural sciences like**

**psychology and neurology), using a pragmatic attitude and phenomenological language. See chapter 1.**

Objective: Something in the world that can be experienced by multiple people and potentially measured. See chapter 4.

Phenomenology: The process whereby we study and communicate things from a first-person or subjective perspective, i.e. things that appear in the consciousness of the individual. See chapter 5.

**Placebo effect: The effect that one will get positive benefits when one simply believes a treatment will work, even if nothing is truly administered. Similarly, in occultism, it can refer to the fact that changes can come about simply through belief in the efficacy of the ritual methods being utilized. See chapter 12.**

Pragmatism: An approach to truth where what is useful is what is true. A belief or concept is "true" insofar as it is useful, not whether it has objective reality or philosophical validity. As Crowley said, "By doing certain things certain results will follow" and "Maximum Convenience is our canon of Truth." See chapter 6.

Ritual: The intentional manipulation of emotionally charged symbolism. See chapter 13.

**Scientific Illuminism: An approach to occultism started by Aleister Crowley in his journal The Equinox, whose motto is "The Method of Science, The Aim of Religion." It is, in many ways, interchangeable with Naturalistic Occultism. See chapters 1-3.**

Scrying: The intentional production – or "making-conscious" – of unconscious imagery.

Subjective: Something that is experienced first-hand and is available only to that person. See chapter 4.

Supernaturalism: The explanation of phenomena through the use of objects, forces, or entities that are not natural, i.e. using supernatural entities (e.g.

angels) or forces (e.g. astral light) that do not abide by natural laws to explain various occurrences. This approach is strictly avoided by Naturalistic Occultists. See chapter 1.

**Symbol schemes: Frameworks that attempt to understand the world by categorizing it in various ways, e.g. the 5 elements, the 7 planets, the 10 Sephiroth, the 12 zodiac signs, etc. See chapter 9.**

Synchronicity: A concept first defined by Carl Jung, which he called "temporally coincident occurrences of acausal events" or "meaningful coincidences." The production of these synchronicities is done intentionally through the priming of our implicit memory to selectively attend to certain classes of stimuli. See chapter 13.

# Appendix II: Recommendations for Further Reading

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**IAO131: http://www.iao131.com**

**Speech in the Silence podcast: http://www.speechinthesilence.com**

**The Journal of Thelemic Studies: http://www.thelemicstudies.com**

*"The Method of Science, The Aim of Religion"*